

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences  
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## **Leveraging social media in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists**

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## **Abstract**

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Leveraging social media in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists, 96 pages, 2 appendices

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The purpose of this thesis was to explore how social media can be leveraged in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists. The objective was to find out what kind of travel-related content attracts the attention of Spanish social media users, and which of Finland's attributes as a holiday destination they find the most appealing. The study also aimed to discover what kind of segmentation opportunities exist among Spanish social media users with respect to their preferences to travel-related content and the use of different platforms.

Data for this study was collected through an online survey. 703 Spanish social media users were asked to evaluate their attitudes towards travel as well as brand content on social media. Respondents were also shown collections of Finland-themed images and asked to indicate preference for the ones they found the most attractive.

Based on the survey results, three market segments were identified. Each of these segments was substantial enough and demonstrated significant potential for the Finnish tourism market. Members of each segment expressed interest in the Finnish tourism product and exhibited homogenous behavior with regard to travel and social media. As a result, Finnish destination marketers can deliver these target audiences highly customized and relevant social media content.

Keywords: destination marketing, social media marketing, tourism

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Appendix 1	Survey questions (English translation)
Appendix 2	Survey questions in Spanish

# 1 Introduction

In today's world, tourism is becoming one of the fastest-growing and most competitive industries in the world. In this dynamic and highly unpredictable environment, destination marketers are seeking new, innovative ways to approach potential visitors. Marketing tourism experiences differs vastly from selling tangible goods – experiences cannot be evaluated prior to consumption, and it can be challenging to re-shape people's pre-existing connotations of a destination.

At the same time, the spread and popularity of information technologies has profoundly changed how travelers look for information, plan and book trips, and the way they share their positive and negative experiences. This revolution has also provided destination marketers with a wide variety of marketing and communication tools to help them increase awareness and build stronger brands. However, even though many destination marketers have adopted these new technologies, they are not leveraging them to their fullest potential. With social media, potential visitors can be reached far more effectively and quicker than ever before.

Spain is often regarded as the top tourist destination in Europe. However, many seem to forget that the traffic is not only inbound. In 2016, Spanish citizens made almost 16 million trips abroad with more than 13 billion euros spent in travel-related expenditures. Over 54 percent of these trips were motivated by leisure, recreation, and holidays. Additionally, the Spanish holiday expenditure abroad grew by 16.5 percent compared to the previous year. (Spanish Statistical Office 2017.) For this reason, the Spanish people should not be overlooked as a potential target audience for destination marketing.

In 2016, Spanish tourists spent about 126 000 nights in Finland (Visit Finland 2017a). This number pales in comparison to the 304 000 overnight stays of the Spanish in Norway in the same year (Innovation Norway 2017). Even though the Finnish figure signifies an 18 percent increase from the previous year, the country lags far behind its Nordic companions (Visit Finland 2017a; Visit Finland 2016a). According to experts, Finland has not been able to exploit its full marketing

potential and is failing to keep pace with its vision of becoming a leading destination for sustainable tourism and pure, Nordic nature (Savon Sanomat 2017; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2010).

In order to build a stronger brand as a potential holiday destination among the Spanish, Finnish destination marketers could take advantage of the opportunities of social media. Spain is among the countries with the highest level of social media engagement in the world – in fact, the average Spaniard connects to 6.2 social media platforms during one week. In comparison, the European average is about 5.4, while worldwide people connect to 4.8 platforms a week. Engagement on social medias is not only common among the young Spaniards – even people between the ages of 54 and 65 are present on at least 4 social media platforms. In fact, the daily use of social medias in Spain increased by almost 15 percent from 2015 to 2016. (RTVE 2016) In destination marketing, the level of engagement provided by social media is critical for developing loyalty and increasing awareness (Hays et al. 2013).

The objective of this thesis is to explore how social media can be leveraged in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists. While the use of social media in destination marketing has been studied to some extent before, the approach has yet to be applied in the context of this thesis. In order to keep up with the competition, Finnish destination marketers need to adopt new techniques and tools. Furthermore, people's social and cultural backgrounds have an immense impact on the meaning they assign to different marketing messages (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2015), for which it is important to produce customized content for each target market. The combination of increased social media engagement and growing levels of Spanish outbound travel validates the need to study the new opportunities of marketing Finland as a unique travel destination to Spanish tourists.

## **2 Objective of the thesis**

This chapter presents the main research question and its supporting sub-questions which serve as the starting point for this thesis. After that, the scope of

the study is established through the definition of delimitations. Lastly, the thesis structure is introduced to depict the research path from start to finish.

## **2.1 Research question**

As mentioned before, the objective of the thesis is to explore how social media can be leveraged in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists. Therefore, the research question was formed as follows:

*How can social media be leveraged in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists?*

In order to achieve a more profound understanding of the topic, a set of supporting sub-question was formed:

1. *What kind of travel-related content attracts the attention of Spanish social media users?*
2. *Which of Finland's attributes as a holiday destination appeal the most to the Spanish?*
3. *What kind of segmentation opportunities exist among Spanish social media users with respect to travel-related content and the use of different platforms?*

These questions were used to define the scope and overall trajectory of the research. As such, the main purpose of this thesis is to find answers to the abovementioned questions.

## **2.2 Delimitations**

The target population of this study includes only Spanish-speaking Spanish nationals. Therefore, the results do not provide any basis for conclusions regarding any other markets. Furthermore, the research focuses solely on destination marketing on social media: as such, only people with active social media accounts are included in the sample. Hence, the results do not provide a faithful representation of Spain's entire population.

Lastly, the research looks at destination marketing only from the Finnish point of view: while the results may provide fascinating insights for destination marketers from other countries as well, the main focus is placed on branding Finland as an attractive holiday destination to Spanish tourists. Furthermore, any forms of travel motivated by work, studies, or anything other than tourism are completely left out from the study, as the purpose is to exclusively investigate the population's attitudes towards leisurely travel.

### **2.3 Thesis structure**

The following parts of the thesis are divided into the literature review, definition of the research methodology, presentation and analysis of research results, and conclusions. The next four chapters are dedicated to the exploration of existing research and literature on areas relevant to this study: that is, destination marketing, social media marketing, Finland as a holiday destination, and lastly, the Spanish tourist. The purpose of this review was to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic which was later leveraged in the selection of appropriate research methods, as well as the analysis of the results. After the literature review, the research methodology and its potential limitations are introduced. This is followed by a thorough presentation of the research results, as well as meaningful analysis of their implications with the intention of finding answers to the aforementioned research questions. Lastly, the main findings of the thesis are presented in the form of conclusions.

## **3 Destination marketing**

The following chapter explores some of the existing research and literature on the concept of destination marketing. The first part examines destination marketing at an introductory level, while the subsequent parts take a more detailed look into the several elements pertaining to the development and promotion of tourism destinations.

### **3.1 Introduction to destination marketing**

Destination marketing refers to the continuous process of generating, communicating, and delivering value to tourists by the stakeholders that form part of the destination's tourism management process (Machlouzarides 2010). Destination marketers need to analyze the needs and expectations of potential visitors, detect appropriate ways of segmenting target markets, and effectively develop competitive brands and unique identities based on the attributes of the destination (Kavoura & Stavrianeas 2015; Soteriades 2012).

Kotler & Armstrong (2012) define marketing as “a social and managerial process by which individuals and organizations obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others”. In fact, marketing revolves around the formation of value-based, mutually beneficial relationships with customers. It is a process by which marketers build and offer value for customers in exchange for their loyalty. Fundamentally, marketing should always be considered an investment, not an expense. After all, potential economic return is a catalyst for all marketing efforts: the impact of marketing may manifest itself directly in increased cash flows or new customers, or indirectly in an improved corporate image, which in turn may lead to greater profits. However, the outcomes of marketing are generally not immediate: building awareness in a society cluttered with brand messages requires a great deal of perseverance. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004.)

The underlying principles of marketing are also applied in the field of destination marketing. Unlike product marketing, destination marketing aims to attract potential visitors by creating, maintaining, or changing attitudes towards particular places. It has, in fact, been estimated that destinations are among the most difficult entities to manage and market (Soteriades 2012). A destination is a conglomerate of multiple attributes with varying utilities for different customers. As a marketable product, a destination must be able to leverage such comparative advantage characteristics as its own culture, history, and physical conditions. (Mazurek 2015.) A large part of the tourism industry is operated by organizations that focus on promoting a certain area – an entire country, a region, or a specific city. These destination marketing organizations (DMOs) attempt to



use their pooled resources to build a destination brand and ultimately increase the number of visitors by identifying and approaching identified target markets on behalf of their stakeholders. (Blain 2001.) This is what makes destination marketing even more complex: DMOs cannot operate as fully independent corporations, as destinations are essentially combinations of the various product and service offerings provided by all local businesses (Hartl 2002).

According to El Kadhi (2009), the image of a destination is the primary element in attracting tourists. In a globalized world, determining and analyzing the perceived image of tourists from multiple cultural backgrounds is becoming increasingly complicated, but at the same time ever more important. Destination marketers need to study the profiles of potential customers in terms of their behavior, preferences, and values so that they can employ appropriate positioning and market segmentation strategies. Wang (2011) concludes that today's tourists have a variety of destinations to choose from, and DMOs are making every effort to compete for their attention in the cutthroat marketplace. As a result, destination competitiveness and attractiveness require effective and integrative marketing and management strategies which are grounded on not only a profound understanding of the target market but the overall market condition.

In today's world, tourism is becoming one of the fastest-growing and most competitive industries in the world (Kavoura & Stavrianeas 2015; Munar 2011). Population growth, increasing wealth, business expansions along with several social factors and the globalization of cultures are only some of the indicators that point towards the growth potential of this trillion-dollar industry (Wang 2011). As the industry grows, so does the variety of tourism destinations, which in turn grants more power to the consumers of tourism products. As competition intensifies, customers expect destinations to offer them even more tailor-made product and service offerings that will meet their elevated expectations (Machlouzarides 2010). To be successful in the tourism market, travel destinations must design, promote and coordinate satisfying total visitor experiences that maximize the financial contribution to the destination

stakeholders, but simultaneously kindle intention to return and referral behavior among destination visitors (Wang 2011).

### **3.2 The tourism product**

From a marketing perspective, tourism destinations are rather unique and it can be challenging to bundle them into productized entities with perceivable benefits. In the end, the tourism product is an abstract service product comprising of several different elements. It shares many features with other services, such as intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability, which all produce their own set of challenges when it comes to communicating potential value to customers. However, as far as typical service products are concerned, the marketing strategy is generally formulated for a single service, or at least within a single company. (Borg et al. 2002; Hartl 2002.) In contrast, the tourism product is a conglomerate of experiences achieved through a diverse array of products and services provided by the host community, such as transport, accommodation, attractions, and other facilities. Medlik and Middleton (1973) define the tourism product as the “total experience” covering the entire amalgam of several components, including everything from airline seats and hotel beds to first impressions, attitudes and expectations.

The tourism product is always tied to a specific physical location that attracts visitors (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004). As such, its key characteristics include:

- The product is associated with a particular geographic area which has an administrative body or boundaries, and government agencies have taken steps to control different aspects of tourism.
- A destination mix is available for visitors: this includes basic infrastructure but also accommodation, restaurants, and other facilities. Correspondingly, there is an array of tourism stakeholders with an interest in the development and prosperity of the destination.
- A tourism marketing effort exists: there is a coordinating organization, such as a DMO, which leads and manages the tourism efforts of the destination by marketing and promoting it to potential visitors.

- There is an existing image of the destination and its tourism offering in people's minds. (Morrison 2013.)

As mentioned before, the tourism product is essentially a service. The service process is characterized by a high level of heterogeneity and the fact that the service experience is always affected by a variety of situational and human factors. The environment in which a service, or an experience, is created is far less controllable than that of physical goods. Furthermore, the production and the consumption of the service are simultaneous. As a result, the total tourism product is predominantly shaped by the tourist's own presence and perception. (Borg et al. 2002.)

One of the most internationally recognized and often-cited depictions of the tourism product is the multi-layered model developed by Smith (1994). According to the model, the tourism product consists of five elements all of which are influenced by the tourist's own experience. At the very core of the model is the physical plant, that is, the destination. Other layers of the model include service, hospitality, freedom of choice and ultimately the tourist's own degree of involvement. Each of these elements should be designed to complement each other, as the final tourist experience is the result of harmonious interaction amid all layers. The model is demonstrated in Figure 1:

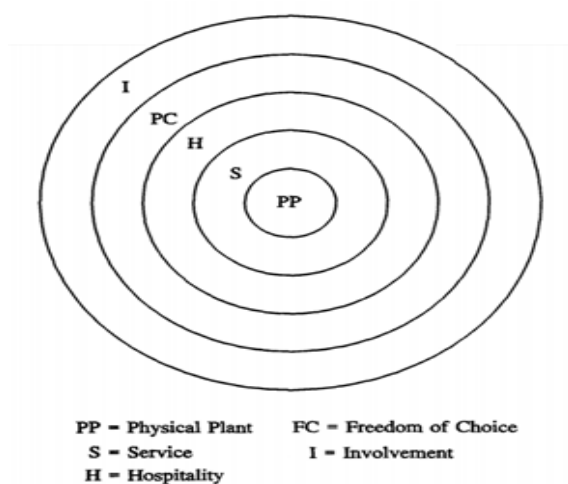


Figure 1. The tourism product (Smith 1994)

The physical plant is the core of any tourism product – without it, none of the remaining layers could exist. It refers to the operating environment, or the places

and spaces in which the tourists are involved in the production of the tourism product. It also includes any conditions that affect the physical environment, such as weather and the level of infrastructure. However, the physical plant alone is not enough to provide a tourism experience. It requires the input of services to make it accessible and useful for tourists. As a result, the second layer of Smith's model incorporates all those tasks required to fulfill the needs of tourists. (Smith 1994.)

The third layer of the model, hospitality, alludes to the attitude or style in which the aforementioned services are performed. It refers to the manner in which local residents and tourism staff welcome tourists to their community. The second outer layer involves freedom of choice – as a part of a satisfactory tourism experience, the traveler must be able to participate in the creation of the tourism product through his or her own choices. At the very basic level, this refers to the liberty to choose whether to purchase or not. More profoundly, tourists should be provided with enough information and guidance to plan their own experience. What is more, freedom does not only imply choice, but also the potential for positive surprises and acts of spontaneity. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004; Smith 1994.)

Lastly, the shell of involvement encapsulates the abovementioned elements of the tourism product. As a service product, the tourism product requires the participation of the tourist in its delivery. The amalgam of physical plant, good service, hospitality, and freedom of choice form the foundation for the tourist's involvement. These elements serve to prepare the tourist for physical, intellectual, and emotional engagement. As such, involvement does not only refer to physical participation, but to the sense of engagement and concentrating on the activity. Therefore, it could be concluded that the optimal tourism product consists of tourist involvement, freedom of choice, high quality service and a welcoming atmosphere in the perfect destination. (Borg et al. 2002; Smith 1994.)

### **3.3 Tourist motivation**

The most fundamental belief behind all marketing theory is that humans instinctively attempt to fulfil their inherent needs. In order to achieve that, humans

must consume. (Moore & Pareek 2006.) The purpose of destination marketing is to simplify and facilitate the decision-making process of potential visitors. The planning and strategy of destination marketing rely completely on the needs and desires of customers. Customer needs must be recognized to design and produce satisfactory tourism products. (Albanese & Boedeker 2003) It is the task of marketing to influence customer choices proactively and to develop local know-how and understanding of visitor expectations. The key to successful destination marketing is to become aware of the needs and attitudes of the target market and generate solutions to bring together customer expectations and destination offerings. (Borg et al. 2002.)

Tourist needs and motivations form the foundation for the creation of a tourism product. Motivation refers to the urge or desire to act in a certain way to achieve a desired future state (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2015). The study of tourist motivation involves a special subcategory of the wider interest area of human motivation. In general, holiday destinations offer varying types of tourism experiences and are most likely to appeal to different kinds of tourists with varied motivations. The array of potential tourist motivations ranges from excitement and arousal to self-development and personal growth. It is the task of destination marketers to match the appropriate tourism product with the appropriate target audience. (Goeldner & Ritchie 2009.)

According to Albanese and Boedeker (2003), the tourist decision-making process is highly intricate in comparison to routinely, everyday consumption. The complexity of travel-related purchase decisions is manifested as follows:

- The decision-making process requires more time.
- The decision to purchase is perceived to involve more risks.
- The process is characterized by an increased involvement of emotions.
- The decision to purchase is supported by extensive research from various information sources.

All destination marketing decisions should be based on thorough analysis of the target market. It is necessary to recognize and predict any potential changes in consumer behavior and understand any underlying motives and potential

outcomes. Destination marketers must be able to identify the mobilizing force behind tourist decision-making: what is the core need, that visitors are seeking to satisfy? (Albanese & Boedeker 2003; Borg et al. 2002). When it comes to understanding tourist motivation, it becomes increasingly more important to study specific types of tourists opting for certain types of holiday experiences. The objective is to connect the dots and focus on the similarities among groups of travelers and the kinds of tourism experiences they seek. (Goeldner & Ritchie 2009.)

In addition to intrinsic needs and motivations, the selection of a holiday destination is also affected by a number of external and situational stimuli, such as changes in one's personal life or finances. By means of marketing communications, the destination marketer attempts to stimulate both internal and external motivations to encourage the customer to select the destination. (Albanese & Boedeker 2003.) According to Moore & Pareek (2006), all choices a person makes are affected by cultural and personal experiences. Thus, a profound understanding of the target customer's cultural background becomes increasingly important so as to resonate with his or her beliefs and attitudes. Pearce (2011) also suggests that personal value systems or expectations may also function as a platform to study tourist motivation. If a person has strong environmental conservation values, he or she is more likely to select a destination that corresponds to those beliefs. Furthermore, a tourist expecting outstanding skiing conditions can be expected to opt for a destination that is most likely to satisfy said desire. Overall, personal beliefs and existing background knowledge play a major role in tourist motivation with regard to destination selection.

Albanese & Boedeker (2003) list the following as the seven most common tourist motivations:

1. Escape from everyday life
2. Relaxation
3. Escape from socially acceptable everyday roles
4. Self-examination and evaluation
5. Enhancing one's status
6. Strengthening family ties

## 7. Increasing the amount of social interactions

The key factor characterizing a tourist is that he or she travels away from his or her habitual place of residence (Wang 2011). A tourist seeks to escape from the routine, and is willing to pay to be entertained, experience something new, and collect new memories (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004). The central motive for contemporary travelers is the desire to undergo new experiences. Traveling is a hedonistic, satisfaction-oriented form of consumption. (Borg et al. 2002) In the modern world, individuals have the liberty to decide how to spend their time and money. Tourism has become a common venue for the expression of well-being as well as an opportunity to enhance one's perceived life satisfaction. (Pearce 2011.)

Goeldner & Ritchie (2009) propose that destination brands function as communicators of the destination image. This image conveys a set of associations or characteristics to which potential visitors attach personal value. Mazurek (2015) adds to this idea by suggesting that the emotional attachment of customers to specific places and the similarities between a destination's characteristics and a customer's own personality are becoming increasingly more meaningful in the study of tourist motivation. Thus, destination brands assume the role of "value enhancers" that produce brand equity and allow the destination to form a relationship with potential visitors (Goeldner & Ritchie 2009). Therefore, it is important for destination marketers to not only study and analyze the motivations and purchase behaviors of the target market, but also leverage the collected information to build attractive brand images in order to shape and modify the beliefs and attitudes of potential visitors.

### **3.4 Destination branding**

Branding can serve as an effective tool to improve the appeal of a holiday destination on the consumer market. A successful brand builds an emotional connection between a product and a consumer. Branding refers to the process of educating consumers about a product or service offering and packaging it into something that can be marketed more easily: without brand awareness, consumers may not even know a certain product exists (Blain 2001). Dann &

Dann (2011) define brands as identifiable characteristics, symbols, physical marks, words, and visual cues that serve to convey a promise of quality, experience, or satisfaction to the consumer. Thus, branding produces mental paradigms that help consumers organize their knowledge about different products on the market and facilitates their decision-making process. In the modern world, as consumers' lives become progressively more hectic and complicated, a brand's ability to clarify decision-making and diminish risk becomes invaluable. Additionally, consumers may begin to assign personal meaning to brands: brand preferences often function as a reflection of a person's self-identity and lifestyle ideals. (Kotler & Keller 2016.)

Positioning is the counterpoint to branding: it refers to the act of placing a brand's offering and image to occupy a specific location in the mind of the consumer. The objective of this process is to differentiate a brand from its competitors by highlighting important benefits and drawing distinctions between quality, price, performance, and other relevant aspects (Moore & Pareek 2006). Brand positioning is at the core of marketing success: it can guide marketing strategy by breaking down the brand's essence, clarifying how it delivers value to customers, and demonstrating how it manages to do so in its own, unique manner. Developing a positioning requires the brand to study and analyze its main competitors as well as existing and potential customers: a frame of reference is mandatory in order to truly understand where the brand stands on the market. (Kotler & Keller 2016.)

Branding is a mode of communication: thus, it is a two-way process in which both the brand owner and consumers provide their own contribution to the co-creation of the brand. According to Kavartzis and Ashworth (2005), the boundaries of the brand construct are on the one side the activities of the brand owner, and on the other side the perceptions of the target market. The brand itself is constructed at the crossing point of these two. The interconnectedness of brand identity, brand positioning and brand image are demonstrated in Figure 2:



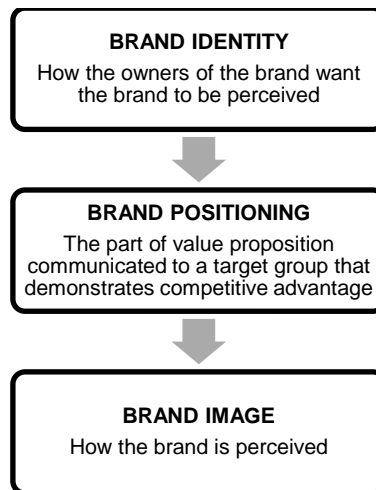


Figure 2. Interdependence between brand identity, brand positioning, and brand image (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005)

A destination brand is used to identify and differentiate a particular destination on the global marketplace. It may involve a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that serve to communicate a promise of a worthwhile travel experience that is expressly associated with the destination in question. Not only that, a destination brand also consolidates and strengthens the recollection of gratifying memories of the destination experience. (Lim et al. 2012; Ritchie & Ritchie 1998.) The most successful destination brands appear to be those that are rich in meaning, provide great conversational value, and stimulate desire in potential visitors (Mazurek 2015).

As explained previously, there are several components that form part of the tourist decision-making process when it comes to selecting a holiday destination. When browsing through different options, an intricate, internally stored network of references filled with associations and images is automatically activated in the consumer's mind (Kavoura & Stavrianeas 2015). According to Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2015), an image is the outcome of an intellectual process in which an individual produces a mental representation about the destination. This representation is fully dependent on the background information the individual has received and stored, and the meaning he or she has assigned to it. This preliminary image is the starting point for all expectations. Personal and socioeconomic characteristics along with numerous external factors influence the stock of information consumers store and the way the destination image is built in their minds. Expectations are formed based on word of mouth communications,

previous experiences, as well as advertising and other promotional activities undertaken by destination marketers. Ultimately, the destination brand image plays a significant role in the tourist decision-making process. (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2015; Kavoura & Stavrianeas 2015.)

Ritchie & Ritchie (1998) suggest that the principal roles of a destination brand are divided into pre-experience and post-experience activities. The effectiveness of a destination brand is fully dependent on how successfully each of these roles is performed. These roles are listed in Figure 3:

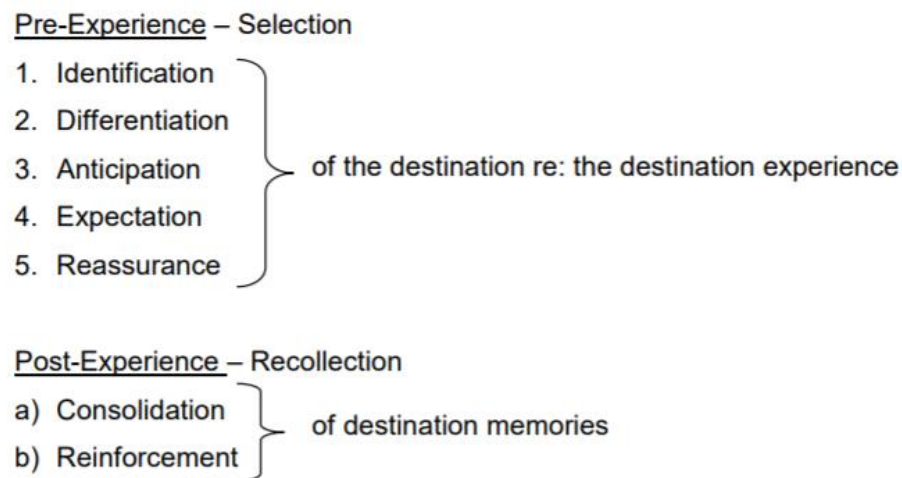


Figure 3. Primary roles of a destination brand (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998)

According to the authors, identification refers to the degree of recognition or association regarding the destination among the minds of consumers. Differentiation, on the other hand, relates to the lack of confusion with other destinations on the market. Anticipation measures the extent to which the brand generates a desire to visit the destination, whereas expectation appertains to the nature and importance of the specific benefits visitors expect to attain from their destination experience. The last of the pre-experience activities is that of reassurance: this refers to the degree to which the brand provides a “cloud of comfort” for the potential visitor – that is, a sensation that things will not go wrong during the destination visit and if they do, they will be appropriately corrected. (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998)

Brands do not only promote the selection of particular destinations over others, but also serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of memories after a

visit. The post-experience roles of a destination brand play an important role in binding the many diverse bits and pieces a visitor remembers into a holistic memory of the tourism experience. The “Recollection” function measures the extent to which the brand helps generate positive memories of the destination, as well as the comfort it provides regarding the tourist’s choice to travel there. An effective destination brand is able to stimulate and tie together the conglomerate of satisfactory destination memories, and continuously reinforce them in the mind of the consumer. (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998.)

The brand name of a destination covers all those tourism products and services that are consumed within the borders of the destination. In order for a place to become a tourism destination, it needs to become recognizable and build its own competitive brand. This unique identity should be established on elements that portray the distinctiveness and character of the place. (Kavoura & Stavrianeas 2015.) When a destination brand is built on existing regional assets instead of embellished images, tourist expectations are also highly likely to be met. Iliachenko (2005) presents the idea of using regional culture, history, and nature as branding constructs. These branding dimensions are based on local traditions, geographic location, landscape features and other elements that embody the unique traits that differentiate the destination from others. As seen in Figure 4, these branding structures can be used all together as well as separately to build and maintain a tourist destination brand.

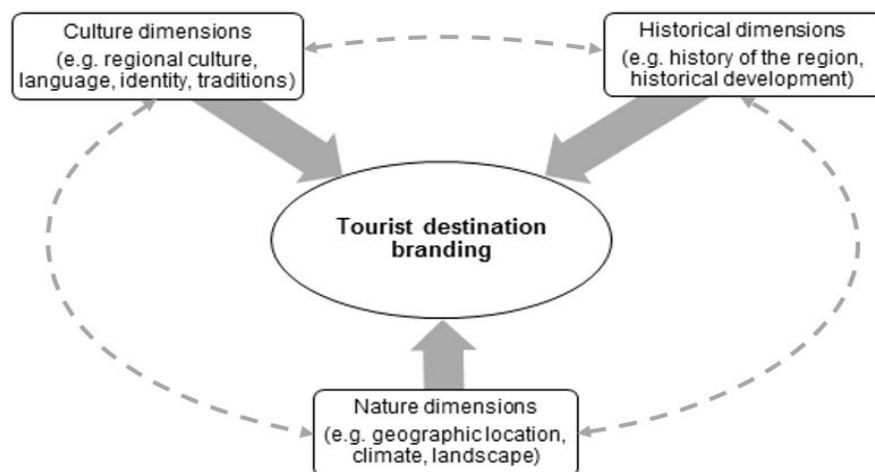


Figure 4. Tourism Destination Branding Model Incorporating Culture, History, and Nature (Iliachenko 2005)

The marketing function has the ability of producing and conveying mental images of a destination. These mental images serve as catalysts for consumer decision-making. Managing consumer expectations and brand promises should be of utmost importance to any destination marketer. In the process of creating a destination brand, one should always bear in mind that consumers are not only passive recipients of marketing communications – in fact, consumers continuously interact with brand messages through their own interpretation and respond either positively or negatively. In the field of destination marketing, there is an increasing need for credible, yet simultaneously attractive brand messages that can help build strong, emotional attachment to specific destinations. The development of destination images is often based on historic, economic, political, social and cultural ties between different nations. As a result of these pre-existing connotations, one picture or word alone can be enough to fortify a consumer's perception of a destination. (Albanese & Boedeker 2002.)

At the same time, tourism destinations are often sold as picture-perfect scenarios and unforgettable experiences – thus, many brand messages are often characterized by inauthenticity and clichéd expressions (Borg et al. 2002). A deceptive brand image is formed when the brand owners disregard the reciprocal nature of brand-building and continuously feed artificial messages to the market (Aaltonen 2011). These empty promises will eventually backfire due to unmet tourist expectations, while truth-based branding can only lead to enhanced perception of quality and enriched customer experiences (Borg et al. 2002).

### **3.5 The role of the DMO**

The principal tasks of a destination marketing organization (DMO) consist of managing the destination's tourism system, improving regional competitiveness and attractiveness, enhancing destination performance, and furthering marketing effectiveness (Soteriades 2012). DMOs amass and integrate the destination's marketing efforts under one roof, and work on behalf of local stakeholders to form a uniform, coherent destination image and, ultimately, increase revenue generated by tourism. DMOs are also charged with involving all tourism stakeholders – including local residents – in the formation of marketing strategies (Morrison 2013).

The role of the destination marketer differs quite vastly from that of conventional product or service marketers. Firstly, a DMO does not hold any control over the quality and quantity of the services and products local businesses provide. DMOs do not own or operate the facilities, attractions, events, or other amenities that tourists encounter during their stay. Another distinctive element characterizing the duty of a DMO is the lack of a pricing function: destination marketers are essentially endorsing products the quality and price of which they cannot control. That is not to say that DMOs do not offer their insight about prevailing market conditions to local businesses – it is, in fact, the task of the destination marketer to promote consensus among tourism stakeholders regarding destination vision, goals, strategies, and plans. DMOs should leverage their acumen to sell their vision to others in the community so as to fulfill their primary mission of destination development. (Morrison 2013.)

Destination marketers are expected to serve the needs of several different stakeholders ranging from government departments to tourism industry professionals. At the same time, they are charged with providing all parties with objective and fair treatment. As a result, a DMO is compelled to find an equilibrium between contrasting priorities and objectives. A DMO is always accountable for its actions, for which it needs to remain sensitive to the interests of the local community. In the first place, the social and cultural resources and values of the community should always be considered in the process of developing and promoting the destination. Secondly, DMOs must be able to demonstrate the broad economic benefits following their promotional efforts: most DMOs are public or quasi-public organizations, which means that their work is often heavily scrutinized to secure maximum productivity. While DMOs are not profit-driven agencies, their accountability must still be proven through the effective handling of funds and impact in generating additional tourism revenue and employment. However, most destination marketers are faced with the difficulty of gaging their own performance: as DMOs are not the ones selling the products or services, there are no direct sales figures to measure and analyze. (Morrison 2013.)

Jefferson & Lickorish (1991) present five key roles for destination marketing organizations:

1. guardian of the image
2. scene setter
3. trail blazer
4. marketing coordinator
5. monitor of visitor satisfaction

The first role has to do with guarding the destination image. This refers to the process of firstly determining the desired image, and secondly creating awareness and positioning that image in the appropriate location in the marketplace. It also includes taking the necessary steps to update and reposition the image. The second role, scene setter, is concerned with helping the local tourism industry to develop the right product for the right segment in the appropriate target market. This involves the introduction of research programs to conduct market analysis. The DMO is responsible for not only carrying out the research, but also for the interpretation and communication of the findings. As a result, local tourism stakeholders are supplied with relevant, up-to-date market intelligence. (Jefferson & Lickorish 1991.)

The third role, trail blazer, deals with the development of new markets, segments, and techniques to ensure return on investment for the local tourism industry. This pioneer role is often tracked by the commercial tourism organizations in the long-run. In its fourth role, the DMO acts as a marketing coordinator, or a liaison between the government and the industry to operate marketing efforts synchronically. This is often considered as the most important role of a DMO: it provides the foundation for an integrated destination strategy embraced by all parties. Lastly, DMOs are also charged with monitoring visitor satisfaction. In this role, the DMO confirms that expectations molded through branding and image creation are also satisfied by the local tourism industry. By researching visitor satisfaction, the DMO can collect useful information about tourists' perceived value and behavior. This grants the ability to either adjust the promised quality of the tourism offering, or even elevate the acceptable level of quality of those

products and services provided by the members of the local tourism industry. (Jefferson & Lickorish 1991.)

The DMO functions essentially as the face of the local tourism industry. Being in such a strategic position, the DMO holds great responsibility over the image and attractiveness of the destination. While the global tourism industry grows and competition for consumer attention intensifies, it becomes increasingly more challenging to earn the interest of consumers. According to Hartl (2002), a DMO's message will only be acknowledged among the noise if it holds the following qualities:

- consistency (there are no conflicting messages)
- frequency (the message is repeated a number of times), and
- reach (enough people come to contact with the message).

Consistency depends upon collaboration and integration among the numerous tourism stakeholders which operate within the given destination. High frequency and reach require monetary resources, which many destinations are finding increasingly scarce. (Hartl 2002.) Due to the increasing level of competition and a lack of interminable budgets, DMOs are often pursuing more innovative, cost-effective ways to promote their destinations. The next chapter delves into the concept of social media marketing and how any destination marketer regardless of their affluence can adopt it as a part of their marketing strategy.

## **4 Social media marketing**

The following chapter studies some of the existing literature and research on social media marketing. In the first part, the term social media is defined. The subsequent parts attempt to inspect the opportunities of social media from a marketer's perspective. The final two parts contemplate the topic more closely from the viewpoint of this study by combining the worlds of destination marketing and social media, and lastly analyzing the components of effective social media marketing communications.

#### **4.1 Definition of social media**

The term social media has come to symbolize various web applications or online communities in which people can post and share content (Lange-Faria & Statia 2012). Different social media platforms can be defined as networks of friends and acquaintances for social or professional interaction (De Vries et al. 2012). Through social media, users are given the ability to create and engage with private, semi-private, and public content through networks of friends, followers, and other social media users (Alhabash et al. 2017). These network sites allow participants to reach out to other people with similar interests and opinions, and can even serve as a platform for self-expression. A growing trend that has characterized social media over the past few years is the increasing use of portable devices (Lange-Faria & Statia 2012): as a result, social media is reaching people at a larger scale and at a quicker pace than any other communication method before.

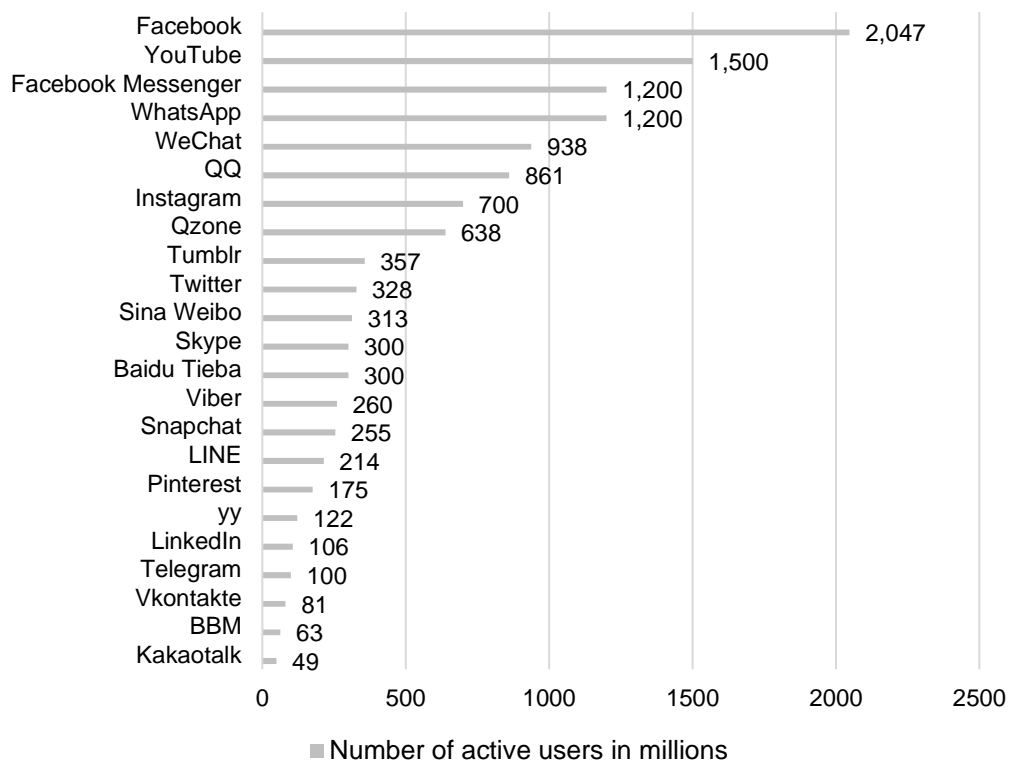
Social media has demonstrated explosive growth in the years following its birth: by 2020, the number of worldwide social media users is expected to reach some 2.95 billion, approximately one third of Earth's entire population. The average internet user spends approximately 109 minutes per day on various social media platforms. The most notorious social networks often boast a high number of user accounts or strong user engagement. Facebook, the largest social networking site in the world, was the first to surpass 1 billion active users per month. (Statista 2017a.) Graph 1 lists the most popular social networks in the world.

D'Andrea et al. (2012) suggest that any social network incorporates the following four elements:

1. Members that interact with each other to fulfill their own needs or portray special roles.
2. A shared purpose that serves as the reason for belonging to the community.
3. Technology and server architecture that support social interaction and promote a sense of togetherness.
4. Contents accessed by members to accomplish their specific needs.



**Global social networks, ranked by number of users 2017**



Graph 1. Global social networks, ranked by number of users 2017 (Statista 2017b)

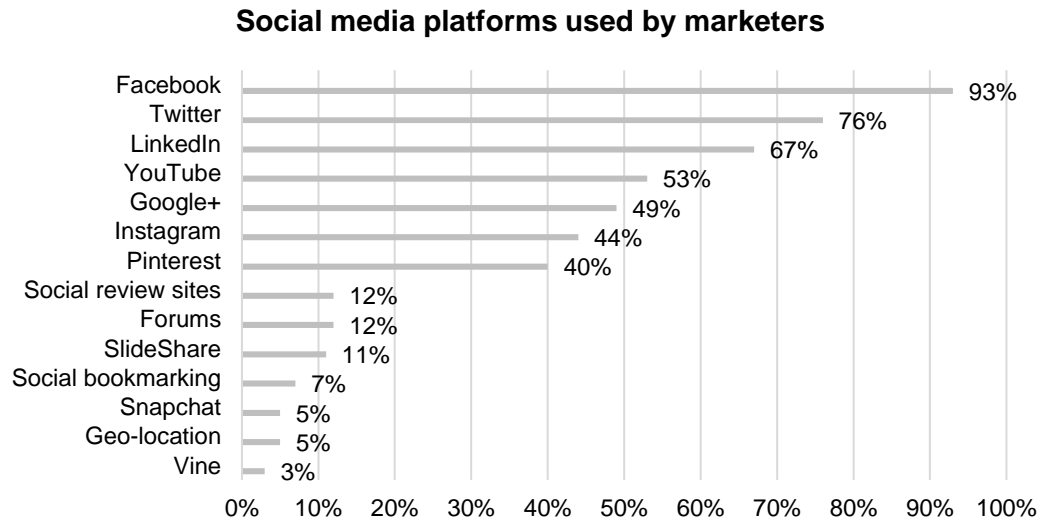
With billions of active users, social media has given new meaning to the concept of communication. In today's world, people are almost always online and engaging in a variety of activities such as making friends, creating content, and sharing information (Song & Yoo 2016). The purpose of social media is rooted in community – users are empowered to participate and share with others in real time without the barriers of time or geography. People join online communities to achieve both tangible and intangible returns. Functional needs lead people to seek concrete benefits, such as promotions or discounts. Social, hedonic, and psychological needs motivate people to pursue the more abstract returns of social media, such as improved reputation, fulfilment of moral obligations, or relationship maintenance. (Song & Yoo 2016; Lange-Faria & Statia 2012.) Dholakia et al. (2004) propose five motivational factors for participation in online networks: 1) purposive value, 2) self-discovery, 3) entertainment, 4) maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, and 5) social enhancement. As such, it could be concluded that social networks do not only serve as a platform for social

interaction and enhancement, but also recreation and the expression of one's own identity.

## **4.2 Social media as a marketing platform**

With the accelerated growth rate of the Internet and social media, marketers began expressing increasing interest in adopting these technologies as part of their strategies. Ever since its birth, there has been considerable hype that the Internet would eventually make traditional business models completely obsolete. (Pradiptarini 2011; Moore & Pareek 2010.) Today, information and communication technologies are bringing down marketing costs, removing unnecessary intermediaries, and giving new meaning to marketing relationships (Soteriades 2012). In fact, traditional marketing channels, such as television and print media, can nowadays be considered excessively costly and limited in providing feedback and stimulating interaction with the target audience. Social media holds numerous advantages over traditional means of marketing, such as low costs and the ability to deliver highly customized messages to precisely targeted audiences. Furthermore, with its day-to-day immediacy social media can provide marketers with rich, unmediated market intelligence faster and more efficiently than ever before. (Hahn et al. 2016; Kotler & Keller 2016.)

The rise of digital marketing has driven more and more marketing professionals to realize the uniqueness and effectiveness of social media as a communication channel. In the modern era, most consumers turn to the Internet to look for product information and recommendations. As an increasing number of brands are becoming aware of the advantages of social media and begin building their own brand pages, even search engine results are directing potential customers to social media sites (Lange-Faria & Statia 2012). According to a 2016 social media marketing industry report, a significant 90 percent of marketers admitted that social media is imperative to their businesses. As seen in Graph 2, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Google+, Instagram, and Pinterest were named among the top seven social media platforms used by marketers, with Facebook being the most popular: in fact, more than half of marketers indicated that Facebook was their most important marketing platform. (Social Media Examiner 2016.)



Graph 2. Social media platforms used by marketers (Social Media Examiner 2016)

Social media marketing can be divided into paid, owned, and earned media. Through paid media, social media channels are offering businesses the ability to reach users through display ads, promoted content, and various applications and plug-ins. (Alhabash et al. 2017.) What is more, advertisers are given access to a number of highly focused ad-targeting options based on user data: for example, Facebook allows advertisers to target their content based on user demographics (such as age, gender, relationship status, education, or even workplace), location, interests, and behaviors (Facebook 2017). While the return on investment of traditional marketing channels is generally quite difficult to measure, social media marketing provides advertisers with a wide range of online tools for tracking and optimization. Advertisers can easily trace the outcomes of their social media marketing efforts by noting how many unique users click or interact with an ad, how long they stay on a landing page, what types of actions they take, and where they go afterwards (Kotler & Keller 2016).

In addition, social media platforms typically charge the advertiser only when a potential customer reacts with their content in the desired way: when setting up a campaign, advertisers are given several pricing options to choose from, such as cost-per-click, cost-per-impression, cost-per-action, or cost-per-like. Advertisers are essentially buying real estate from social media platforms to display their ads to the users. However, the space for promoted content is limited: therefore, different advertisers soliciting the same target audience are put against

each other in an auction. For this reason, each advertiser sets a maximum amount they are willing to pay for their desired outcome, such as a click or an impression. The suitability of each bidding strategy depends upon the advertiser's marketing objective: for instance, brand awareness campaigns often optimize for impressions, while lead-focused campaigns are given the option to only pay for those clicks that induced a specific action, such as filling out a contact form.

Marketers may also employ strategic tactics using organic presence, wherein the business directly shares content to their followers online (Alhabash et al. 2017). Organic media, sometimes also referred to as owned media, refers to the marketer's efforts to utilize free tools provided by each social network to build a social community. Marketers can create brand fan pages, and populate them with brand posts containing videos, messages, quizzes, information, and other material. Customers can become fans or followers of these brand pages, and subsequently interact with brand posts. Users who follow particular brand pages are inclined to display more loyalty and commitment to the brand, and are also more receptive to brand messages. (De Vries et al. 2012) Through earned social media, marketers are reaping the benefits of electronic word-of-mouth and user-generated content (Alhabash et al. 2017). It refers to unaffiliated users voluntarily sharing or mentioning the brand's social media content, and thus generating new traffic to the brand page completely free of charge. It is commonly recognized in the marketing community that sharing brand content among friends on social media generates much higher brand awareness and purchase intent than any form of paid advertising (Song & Yoo 2016).

According to Hahn et al. (2016), social media has become an important tool for marketers to influence consumer behavior in the areas of brand awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchasing behavior and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Marketers are now using social media to follow their customers, stimulate conversation, receive feedback, and become better acquainted with the habits of the target market. Participation in social media and reciprocal interaction with customers is becoming imperative to developing loyalty and increasing brand awareness. (Veríssimo & Menezes 2015; Hays et al. 2013) However, given the initially noncommercial nature of

social media and the most fundamental motives why people use it, attracting consumer attention and converting them into actual, paying customers can be at times challenging. For this reason, marketers must understand that when it comes to social media, only a portion of users wants to engage with brands, and even then, only some of the time. (Kotler & Keller 2016) While social media does not change the ultimate objective of marketing, it does require marketers to switch their mindsets and realize the importance of building a personal community environment for consumers (D'Andrea et al 2012). Even so, social media is still at its initial stages, for which marketers are only beginning to understand how to make the most of different platforms and their massive, well-defined audiences.

#### **4.3 Brand co-creation through social media**

The key distinguisher between social media and traditional marketing channels is the fact that the former is very participatory and conversational in nature. Social media does not only serve as a tool for promotion and sales, but also for building a relationship between a brand and consumers. While marketing brands through social media can be tremendously precise and effective, it is also highly interactive and, logically, social. (Hahn et al. 2016) Online communications have empowered consumers, and made it possible for them to become active participants instead of passive recipients (Heinonen 2011). In today's marketing environment, customers define the rules of engagement: this means that marketers have lost substantial control over their brands, since information is nowadays multidirectional and sometimes unpredictable (Hahn et al. 2016; Kotler & Keller 2016).

In the age of the social networks, any customer of a brand is a potential brand evangelist (Moore & Pareek 2010). Consumers are now participating in activities that have been previously administered by brand owners themselves. Through social media, users have the ability to express their opinions, which consequently enables dialogue between brands and consumers (Kao et al. 2016). User-generated content – that is, content designed, produced, and published by consumers – is becoming of utmost importance to the creation of brands. According to Lange-Faria & Statia (2012), research suggests that consumers

perceive user-generated content as more reliable and authentic than information provided by brands themselves.

The emergence of social media has completely altered the paradigm of brand creation. Traditionally, branding has been an activity undertaken by brand owners to develop a positive image and as a means of product differentiation. However, with social media branding has transformed into a two-way conversation, in which consumers participate in the creation of the brand. (Lim et al. 2012) The meaning and value of a brand are now the result of an interactive process with and among consumers involved with the brand. This process is referred to as co-creation. The outcome of the co-creation process is a brand image which mirrors the complete experience consumers have with the brand's offering. On social media, users intentionally or unintentionally participate in the co-creation process by creating and sharing different types of content. (Kao et al. 2016) As such, companies that cultivate enthusiasm among their followers have the potential to have their message spread virally (Moore & Pareek 2010).

The implication of this shift in the marketing paradigm is that marketers are no longer the sole controllers of their brands. However, this change has also brought about certain advantages: enhanced interaction among brand owners and consumers may also lead to innovation and increased customer value (Kao et al. 2016). As consumers actively engage on social media, their purchasing decisions become increasingly more affected by their online interactions (Song & Yoo 2016). As a result, brand owners need to pay more attention to the reactions and behaviors of their online audience, and either learn from them or respond in the appropriate manner.

#### **4.4 Destination marketing on social media**

The abundance of easily-accessible information on the Internet has fundamentally changed consumers' expectations with regard to travel and holidays. Customers are now able to share their travel experiences and opinions about destinations openly with the rest of the world. (Machlouzarides 2010.) The virtual marketplace is now being considered an ideal environment for destination marketing (Soteriades 2012). Tourism is an information-intensive industry, and

social media has become one of the most important sources of online travel information. Thus, the significance of adopting social media practices becomes emphasized in destination marketing: however, most DMOs are still at the initial stages of learning how to leverage different social networks to promote their destinations. (Hays et al. 2013; Lim et al. 2012.)

An increasing number of destination marketers are participating in social media activities in order to improve the image of their destination. These endeavors are backed up by industry statistics: consumers use social media continuously throughout their travel process. Firstly, consumers turn to social networks during the planning phase, also known as the pre-purchase stage. This is the point when a consumer becomes aware of his or her desire to travel, and begins searching for information and evaluates different alternatives. Travel-related purchases are regarded as tremendously complex due to the composite and experiential nature of the tourism product. These decisions are also perceived to involve more risk, which necessitates extensive information search. (Fotis et al. 2012) The virtual marketplace is characterized by an abundance of easily accessible content, for which it can be difficult for destination marketers to become the preferred information providers. Thus, the objective of social media marketing is to become more visible to the target market and secure a substantial share of the tourism-related online traffic by improving the resources that potential visitors depend on for their holiday decisions. (Wang 2011.)

Tourists do not only use social media during the planning phase of their holidays, but also in the process and by the end of their holiday. For this reason, destination marketers need to recognize the importance of community building and user-generated content on social media (Wang 2011). Potential visitors often rely on user-generated data during their decision-making process, and are choosing holiday destinations based on the unfiltered and topical opinions of their peers. Rather than glorified, perfectly posed images, consumers are now seeking credible, candid photos posted by earlier guests on social media. (O'Connor et al. 2011.) User-generated content may, in fact, allow potential visitors to grasp the value and the impacts of the highly intangible tourism product more easily (Veríssimo & Menezes 2015). Therefore, it is recommended that destination

marketers bear the communal nature of social networks in mind, and develop practices that incorporate authentic experiences and user-generated content.

Aside from their utility as information sources, social networks also facilitate storytelling (Fotis et al. 2012). At its most successful, destination marketing can communicate the true atmosphere or spirit of the destination to the potential visitor (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004). By building a virtual community that is a truly worthwhile place for consumers to visit, destination marketers may attract new customers, sustain effective communication with previous, actual, and potential visitors, and transmit confidence and credibility. This allows destination marketers to manage their online reputation and benefit from the viral effect of content that is relevant to tourists. By engaging in social media, a DMO can help to establish an emotional connection between the destination brand and the tourist. These emotional links are vital to tourist decision-making, and can be developed at any stage of the decision process. (Veríssimo & Menezes 2015.)

#### **4.5 Effective marketing communications on social media**

Social media marketing is concerned with building long-term relationships and trust via reciprocal communications and content that customers find interesting. According to Pradiptarini (2011), the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on three aspects: content quality, customer involvement, and integration with other media platforms. In the field of digital marketing, the focus has shifted from the quantity of content to the quality of content (Hakola & Hiila 2012). The content on a brand's social media site should be on subjects that are relevant and relatable to the target audience. Interesting content invites actual and potential customers to engage with the brand's social media, which in turn helps to build emotional ties and involvement between the customer and the brand. (Pradiptarini 2011.)

In order for the brand's social media marketing efforts to remain cohesive and effective, some form of integration between different marketing platforms is required (Pradiptarini 2011). However, this does not mean that the brand should be visible on all possible platforms: the appropriate marketing channels should be selected based on the brand's specific marketing objectives. While the brand's



core message and identity should always remain unaltered, the same social media content should not be recycled across all platforms for the sake of maximum visibility. (Hakola & Hiila 2012) Different marketing channels serve for distinct purposes, for which it is important to adapt and modify the content to fit the specific characteristics of the platform in question (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004). Brands should assign clear and unique roles for each social media platform, define their specific target audiences, and determine guidelines for content creation. By understanding the role and nature of each social media platform, the marketer is able to target certain messages to more defined audiences, hence increasing content attractiveness and overall marketing effectiveness. (Hakola & Hiila 2012.)

The baseline for all social media content should be the definition of marketing objectives. A brand's objective may be, for instance, to increase website traffic, expand brand awareness, or enhance brand image. What is more, when designating roles for various social media platforms, the marketer should consider the platform-specific goals: what does the brand want to accomplish by being active on each particular social network? These decisions are aided by a thorough analysis of the target audience of the social network in question. The marketer needs to understand who the members of the target audience are, and what type of content or interaction they are seeking from different social media platforms. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the type of content or themes that are appropriate for each channel. (Hakola & Hiila 2012.) As a result of this analysis, a brand should be able to make clear distinctions between various social networks, and plan and create content that suits the character of the platform and also resonates with its users.

When planning and designing marketing messages, it becomes necessary to find the appropriate stimuli or methods through which the message can be expressed (Albanese & Boedeker 2003). In social media marketing, the challenge is to firstly capture people's attention and secondly to tempt them to click on and view the content (De Vries et al. 2012). In practice, this translates into understanding consumer behavior and leveraging this intelligence in the planning of marketing messages. Effective messages are based on interpretations of consumers'

everyday life and the environment in which they reside. (Albanese & Boedeker 2003) A brand's social media content should indicate humbleness, honesty, and conciseness, while simultaneously providing enough information to satisfy the customer (Pradiptarini 2011). Powerful content can be creative, but its core message should always be easy enough to interpret so that consumers can perceive the value offering without difficulty (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004).

A brand may want to incorporate the AIDA model into its social media marketing strategy (Dann & Dann 2011). The AIDA model describes the cognitive process a marketing message intends to stimulate in a person (Figure 5). The acronym stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. While the formula itself is rather simple, it is often believed that if a marketing message fails to deliver just one of the AIDA components, it will fail.

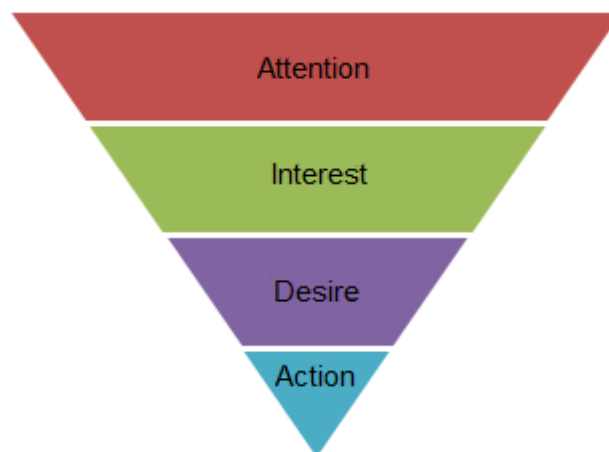


Figure 5. The AIDA Model

In the attention phase, the marketer aids the consumer to become aware of the marketed product and aims to trigger the recognition of a need. This is the stage where the customer is scrolling through social media, and stumbles upon the brand's content. In order to capture the customer's attention, a marketer may pay attention to such factors as colors, fonts, images, sound, music, duration, and placement. Once the customer has become aware of a brand post on social media, it is time to incite interest. In the AIDA model, interest refers to the click-through moment when the customer recognizes a need or desire for the product. To stimulate interest, marketers consider such elements as headlines,

typography, word choices and the meanings different symbols, such as images and text, convey collectively. (Dann & Dann 2011; Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004.)

In the desire phase, the marketer attempts to remove any remaining hesitation from the customer's mind. Desire refers to outright willingness to buy a product, for which this stage is rather persuasion-heavy. To kindle desire, marketers use a range of sales arguments and intend to evoke dreams and passion. The main focus of the desire phase is the value and benefits the product has to offer. Finally, in the action phase the marketer aims to close the deal by guiding the customer to a purchase decision. This is aided by a number of incentives, such as discounts, contests, limited availability, and outright calls-to-action. As the final step of the process, one should never disregard the importance of an effective call-to-action: without it, consumers are highly unlikely to follow the desired course of action and transform from leads to actual customers. (Dann & Dann 2011; Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2004.)

When it comes to destination marketing on social media, evoking emotional responses will have a particularly significant impact on positive brand evaluations. A positive reaction to an online advertisement contributes to the consumer's overall image of the destination brand. (Hahn et al. 2016.) However, it should be noted that most social media users are aware that destination marketers attempt to highlight the positive aspects of their destination. If the brand's social media content is perceived as overly biased and inauthentic, potential visitors will look for the opinions and experiences of more objective sources (Lange-Faria & Statia 2012). To exude authenticity and credibility, the destination brand's social media content should draw from the existing characteristics of the destination. The following chapter discusses Finland as a holiday destination and explores those of its qualities that should be accentuated in the country's destination marketing strategy.

## **5 Finland as a holiday destination**

This chapter explores the many factors affecting Finland's stance as a holiday destination. Firstly, the importance of tourism to the Finnish economy is introduced. Secondly, Visit Finland, the organization responsible for coordinating

Finland's destination marketing efforts, is presented. The last two parts dive deeper by looking at Finland's specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as well as reviewing the country's existing brand and strategy.

### **5.1 The importance of tourism to the Finnish economy**

The significance of tourism to the Finnish economy is far greater than many seem to believe. According to the Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa (2017), the Finnish tourism industry accounts for a total of 3.8 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Tourism has become an important export industry and an employer at a national level. For several years now, the annual revenue generated by tourism has been over 13 billion euros, but it has the potential to grow to as much as 20 billion euros by 2025 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2015).

As the traditional safety pillars of the Finnish economy, lumber and metal, are moving production offshore, Finland needs new success stories. The Finnish tourism industry has notable growth potential, it provides employment, and brings in both tax and export income while promoting local wellbeing. Tourism has broad multiplicative effects on economic activity across the entire country. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2010) Tourism is the only export industry that also accrues value added tax back into the Finnish economy. In fact, the tourism industry generates one and a half times more value added tax income than the Finnish food industry, and more than twice the amount produced by agriculture. (Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa 2017)

The number of international travelers has more than doubled since the start of the new millennium. This growth has not been self-evident considering the global economic instabilities. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2010) In 2016, international travel to Finland increased to a total of 7.7 million visits. During the same year, international visitor spending also grew by 5 per cent from 2015. (Visit Finland 2017b.) Tables 1 and 2 list the top 10 countries of origin based on total spending and number of visits in Finland:

Country	Number of visits in 2016	Change from 2015 (%)	Actual change
1. Russia	2,686,500	-3.80%	-107,400
2. Estonia	921,500	-1.10%	-10,400
3. Sweden	860,600	+6.00%	+48,400
4. Germany	404,400	+17.20%	+59,200
5. China	356,000	+34.90%	+92,000
6. United Kingdom	253,200	+0.80%	+1,900
7. Japan	231,400	+17.90%	+35,000
8. France	176,000	+12.90%	+20,000
9. United States	145,200	+3.40%	+4,800
10. Spain	143,800	+26.20%	+29,900

Table 1. Top 10 for visits to Finland in 2016, based on country of residence (Visit Finland 2017b)

Country	Spending in 2016 (€m)	Change from 2015 (%)	Actual change (€m)
1. Russia	469	-4.4%	-21.4
2. China	335	+30.0%	+77.3
3. Sweden	172	+10.4%	+16.2
4. Germany	151	+2.4%	+3.6
5. Estonia	126	-15.3%	-22.6
6. Japan	117	+4.5%	+5.0
7. United Kingdom	116	+26.3%	+24.1
8. France	99	+10.8%	+9.6
9. Spain	84	+35.7%	+22.0
10. United States	80	+7.8	+5.8

Table 2. Top 10 for total spending, based on country of residence (Visit Finland 2017b)

There are approximately 28 900 businesses that operate in the Finnish tourism industry (Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa 2017). In total, tourism provides employment for roughly 140 000 people, particularly those under the age of 30. However, it should be noted that tourism also employs professionals from various other industries. It is estimated that each euro generated by the tourism industry

also produces approximately 56 cents of additional revenue to other industries. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2010.)

In addition, large investments are being made within the Finnish tourism industry: the country's capital region alone will invest an estimated 600-700 million euros in the construction of new hotel facilities by 2020 (Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa 2017). The developments in the tourism industry have a positive impact on the country's overall infrastructure, which in turn allows for advancements in the business activities of other industries, as well. However, it should be noted that the positive impacts of tourism are not only limited to financial benefits: at its best, tourism can also support the strengthening of Finland's cultural identity. Any culturally and environmentally aware forms of tourism are likely to evoke a sense of national pride and bolster regional traditions and identities. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2010.)

## **5.2 Visit Finland**

Visit Finland is an integral part of Finpro, a public organization that assists Finnish SMEs along their way towards internationalization, encourages foreign direct investment, and promotes travel to Finland. Visit Finland is the unit responsible for promoting Finland as an attractive tourist destination and acting as the tourism authority of the country. The research and expertise of Visit Finland is leveraged by industry professionals in the development and marketing of various tourism products aimed at an international audience. The operations of Visit Finland are funded by the Finnish government: the budget for 2016 was approximately 10 million euros. In addition, the Finnish tourism industry contributes roughly 1 million euros to various marketing activities. (Visit Finland 2017c.)

The main tasks of Visit Finland can be summarized as follows:

1. Developing Finland's image as a travel destination at a global level. In practice, this translates into various promotional activities conducted in collaboration with industry stakeholders. Visit Finland is a member of the Finland Promotion Board, which holds the main responsibility over Finland's country brand. According to Visit Finland's strategy, marketing efforts vary between different target markets

depending on the local marketing costs as well as Finland's existing reputation within the market in question. (Visit Finland 2017d.)

2. Acquisition and analysis of market intelligence as required by the tourism industry. Visit Finland is charged with acquiring new information about various markets, and analyzing and interpreting the data for the benefit of the Finnish tourism industry. Understanding different target markets and tourism trends is crucial to the development and planning of Finland's tourism offering and its marketing. (Visit Finland 2017d.)

3. Promoting high-quality product development and productization. Visit Finland takes part in the product development projects of local tourist resorts as well as the planning of regional tourism strategies and programs. Visit Finland also acts as a liaison between the industry and those public organizations that fund it. (Visit Finland 2017d.)

The primary objective of Visit Finland is to increase the revenue generated by the Finnish tourism industry. In order to achieve this, Visit Finland believes it needs to place more focus on the development and promotion of Finland's brand as opposed to traditional product-marketing. (Visit Finland 2015.) Despite promising growth, Finland only receives approximately 0.4 per cent of all worldwide travel. As such, Visit Finland is faced with the challenge of promoting a somewhat unknown destination with relatively scarce resources. (Visit Finland 2016b.) In order to keep up with the competition, there is a need for innovativeness and finding new ways of making the most out of Finland's unique and distinctive characteristics.

### **5.3 Finland's tourism offering: a SWOT analysis**

Considering Finland's peripheral location, small population size, and economic history, the country has managed to become a noteworthy holiday destination at an enviably quick pace. According to Linnoila (2011), many of the major trends in worldwide travel indicate that the Finnish tourism industry has a lot of potential for growth, as long as the country makes the right moves with regard to its marketing and branding strategies. Finland possesses a number of unique

attractions that have the ability of tempting foreign travelers to the country. Eccentricity, or even exoticness, are some of Finland's most important assets.

In order to monitor a destination's external and internal marketing environment, a SWOT analysis is often conducted. Any marketer needs to evaluate key macro- and microenvironment forces that may affect its ability to earn profits. A SWOT analysis is a way of assessing the destination's overall strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) In 2015, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland presented a roadmap for growth and renewal in Finnish tourism for 2015-2025. As part of this new strategy, a SWOT analysis was realized:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Versatile product range</li> <li>• Clean nature, air, water, and food</li> <li>• Outdoor activities</li> <li>• Expertise with snow and northern lights</li> <li>• Contrast to mass tourism</li> <li>• Silence, peacefulness</li> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• Stories: Santa Claus, Moomins, Kalevala, Angry Birds</li> <li>• Originality of the Finnish culture</li> <li>• Creativity: culture, media, games, communications, design</li> <li>• High-quality, versatile tourism resorts</li> <li>• Education, competent workforce</li> <li>• Procedures and services supporting entrepreneurship</li> <li>• An operational model for national theme-based umbrella programs</li> <li>• Functioning infrastructure and other services</li> <li>• Technology know-how</li> <li>• Overall safety – from the government to the consumer</li> <li>• High standard of living and quality of life</li> <li>• Strong domestic markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism is not taken seriously as a source of livelihood</li> <li>• Awareness and accessibility</li> <li>• Networking and collaboration</li> <li>• The importance of nature in tourism has not been recognized</li> <li>• The potential of culture and other creative fields has not been leveraged</li> <li>• Scattered expertise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know-how in business and varying level of quality</li> <li>• Utilization of electronic business opportunities</li> <li>• Lack of long-term strategic planning</li> <li>• Lack of risk-taking and prioritization</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Inadequacies in tourism statistics</li> <li>• Lack of innovations in tourism</li> <li>• Few third-party investments</li> <li>• Sales, visibility of product offering</li> <li>• Deterioration of road network and other infrastructures</li> <li>• Legislation which does not support tourism, zoning</li> <li>• Expense structure, small margins, profitability, taxation</li> <li>• Price level</li> <li>• Seasonal work</li> <li>• Visa application process, border infrastructure</li> <li>• School holiday season vs. other EU countries</li> <li>• Aging entrepreneurs</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values – back to basics</li> <li>• Culture tourism, Finnish stories</li> <li>• Clean, healthy, and high-quality food</li> <li>• Nature and culture as the basis for wellness travel</li> <li>• Year-round supply</li> <li>• Reform of the winter product</li> <li>• Archipelago tourism</li> <li>• Collaboration between parallel industries</li> <li>• Profiled, high-margin quality products</li> <li>• Stopover travel</li> <li>• Growing target markets: Russia and Asia, seniors</li> <li>• New luxury</li> <li>• Accessibility for everyone</li> <li>• Increasing visibility on social media and leveraging digitalization</li> <li>• Climate change vs. Central and Southern Europe</li> <li>• Sustainable and low-carbon product offering, ecological solutions and Finnish cleantech expertise</li> <li>• Novelty value</li> <li>• Maintaining Helsinki as a competent flight hub</li> <li>• Creation of new flexible working time systems</li> <li>• Research supporting tourism</li> <li>• Collaboration amongst the Nordics, the Baltic Sea, and Europe (tours across countries, marketing overseas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change proceeds faster than expected – carbon footprint</li> <li>• The situation at the Baltic Sea weakens</li> <li>• Long recession of the world economy</li> <li>• Global competition increases – economic downturn</li> <li>• Decrease in price competitiveness</li> <li>• Increases in consumption taxes</li> <li>• Increases in fuel prices</li> <li>• Declining vs. excess traffic from Russia</li> <li>• Increasing competition over spare time</li> <li>• Structural changes in flight traffic</li> <li>• Grey economy, particularly in the restaurant sector</li> <li>• Declining overall safety</li> <li>• Workforce availability due to population aging</li> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• Foreigners perceive Finland as expensive</li> </ul>

Table 3. Finland's SWOT analysis (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2015)



Finland's key strengths can be retrieved from the country's geographical location and those characteristics of its nature, culture, population, and society which form the foundation for tourism. Finland is very uniquely positioned at the crossroad of East and West, sharing a border with both Scandinavia and Russia. The country boasts a number of attractive destinations – such as the capital Helsinki and its neighboring regions, the Turku archipelago, the Finnish Lakeland, and Lapland (Figure 6) – and a versatile, high-quality tourism offering. According to Vuoristo & Vesterinen (2009), Finland's seasonal changes provide an ideal setting for both summer and winter tourism, and overall conditions are favorable as there are no significant problems caused by storms or other meteorological phenomena. However, Vuoristo & Vesterinen (2009) also believe that ice and snow are Finland's core strengths, as they enable a range of activities filled with both esthetical and experiential value. What is more, as many tourists originate from some of the most densely populated areas of the world, space and tranquility can also be seen as some of Finland's most valuable assets. Finland is not, nor will it ever be, a hub for mass tourism: however, this allows the country to serve narrower niche markets and customize its offering to suit the needs of more experienced, venturesome travelers.

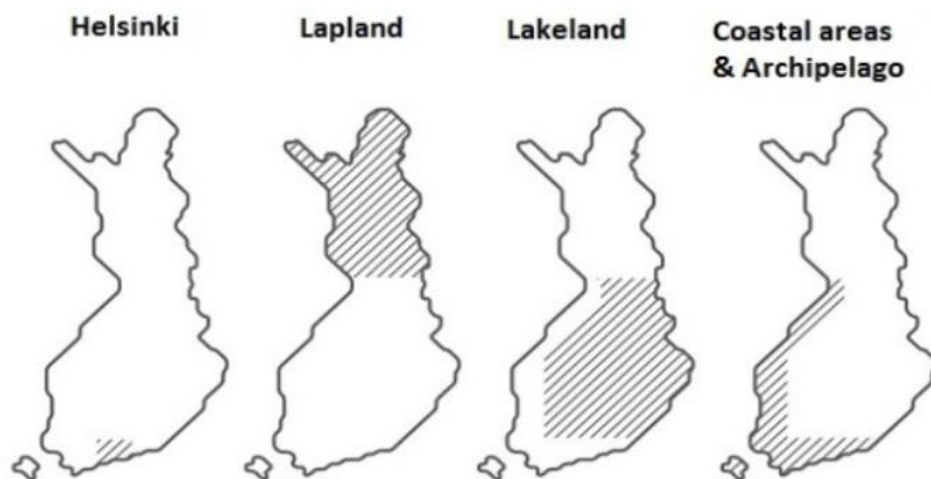


Figure 6. Finland's four tourism regions (Visit Finland 2016c)

Finland's main weakness as a holiday destination is the fact that the country still remains relatively unknown to the global public. While the country's geographical location can be seen as an asset, at times it may also be a weakness: many tourists regard Finland as a remote, desolate destination that is difficult to access.

Furthermore, high price level and tax rate are other factors limiting Finland's growth as a holiday destination. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2015), Finns are only now beginning to recognize the importance of tourism to the country's overall wellbeing. For this reason, Finland lags far behind its European counterparts in the implementation of tourism-friendly legislation and other procedures. The country's tourism expertise has been scattered and there has been a serious need for long-term strategic planning. While Finland may be at the forefront in technology and education, the country still needs to master how to capitalize on its other assets and market itself as a high-profile holiday destination.

A vast majority of Finland's opportunities are prompted by a number of travel megatrends taking place on the global market. According to Borg et al. (2002), pristine natural areas are increasing in popularity among international tourists. Finland is the land of a thousand lakes, and has the ability to offer nature and wilderness experiences in a peripheral, yet fully functional and developed setting. Natural peace, pristine forests, swamps, and bodies of water can function as an effective pull factor in the particularly eco-conscious European market. The growth of sustainable tourism may be the lifeline of the Finnish tourism industry. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2015) also mentions the possibility of boosting collaboration between Finland and its neighboring countries, along with increasing the online visibility of the country's tourism offering. By taking advantage of the impacts of digitalization, even the smallest of tourism stakeholders can become visible at a global scale. What is more, the ministry suggests that Finland has the opportunity of producing high-margin value-added services to tourists. The country's strengths, such as its clean nature, original culture, favorable living conditions, and functional infrastructure should be productized into easily approachable and attractive entities. This new approach to the Finnish tourism product combined with the benefits of digitalization may make it easier for Finland to stand out amongst the competition.

However, the Finnish tourism industry is also highly affected by a range of external market conditions, or threats. For instance, any fluctuations in the global

or domestic economy, such as increases in fuel prices or taxation, are highly likely to have an influence on international tourism. Furthermore, any changes in the world's political climate have a direct impact on tourist decision-making. Other factors that the ministry lists include intensifying competition or the possibility that foreigners may still continue to view Finland as an overly expensive destination. There is also a multitude of domestic threats that may influence Finland's attractiveness as a holiday destination: these include potential increases in crime, declining overall safety and the aging of the population, which in turn may lead to a labor shortage. While individual organizations have practically no control over the aforementioned threats, the members of the Finnish tourism industry should still bear them in mind and take a proactive approach to the planning of their long-term activities.

#### **5.4 Finland's brand and strategy**

Finns are often characterized by their humble and modest character, which may have influenced their approach to marketing themselves and their country. However, after decades in tourism oblivion, Finns are pulling out all the stops to place their country on the map of world travel destinations. The biggest challenge for Finland is that it is fairly unknown as a holiday destination. To the global public, Finland remains relatively undistinguished from the rest of the Nordics, all of which are backed up by much larger government budgets aimed at the promotion of tourism (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2010).

In a 2015 study conducted by Bloom Consulting, Finland's popularity was assessed by studying the digital demand of various tourist destinations based on search engine data and other online and offline behavior. According to the study, Finland comes out 24<sup>th</sup> among all European countries, and 4<sup>th</sup> among its main competitors – behind Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, but ahead of Estonia. The study also revealed that potential visitors are far less aware of Finland's specific tourism offering than those of its rivals. When it comes to marketing and branding Finland as a holiday destination, it may be difficult if not impossible to entirely shift consumers' perceptions when going up against competitors with far more affluence and resources. As a result, Finland's branding work and

communications are at their most effective when focused on building associations and overall familiarity.

In 2006, the Finland Promotion Board was established by the Finnish Council of State with the intend of better coordinating the country's brand communications. The Board's work culminated in the creation of a new official country brand, which would since then serve as the soul and backbone of Finland's marketing communications. The brand consists of four words, or four C's, which were all retrieved from various features of the Finnish mentality, nature, and society (Table 4). (Vuoristo & Vesterinen 2009.)

<b>Creative</b>	<b>Contrasting</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity in the fields of arts and science</li> <li>• Finland is unexpected, surprising, peculiar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finland is a land of contrasts: darkness vs. Midnight Sun, city and countryside, changing seasons, East and West</li> </ul>
<b>Credible</b>	<b>Cool</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finland is dependable and functional.</li> <li>• Efficient infrastructure, high-quality services, safety and security, solid technology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finland is nice, trendy, eventful, and a refreshing alternative.</li> <li>• People, lifestyle, climate – all are one of a kind and unique.</li> </ul>

Table 4. Finland's Four C's adapted from Visit Finland 2010; Vuoristo & Vesterinen 2009

According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2010), Finland's strategy until 2020 is to continue enhancing the country's identified strengths, and help expansive and networked tourism organizations to succeed. In its roadmap for growth and renewal in Finnish tourism for 2015-2025 (2015), the Ministry expressed that Finland's vision for 2025 is to become a top tourist destination in Northern Europe. Finland's mission for the same year is to surpass 20 billion euros in tourism demand, and to ensure that the Finnish tourism industry provides wealth, wellbeing, and employment across the entire country. The Ministry believes that this can be achieved through a customer oriented approach, innovation, digitalization, sustainability, and profitability.

In its task of guiding and coordinating Finland's tourism efforts, Visit Finland has developed three major tourism themes that pinpoint the direction of the organization's marketing communications:



Figure 7. Marketing Themes of Visit Finland adapted from Visit Finland 2016c

In addition to the creation of these marketing themes, Visit Finland has clearly defined its target audiences. Rather than pleasing everyone, Visit Finland focuses its marketing activities to people whose value sets match the idea of traveling to Finland. Finland's target group, "modern humanists", consists of people who have traveled a lot and are looking for new, fresh alternatives to mass tourism. This group accounts for a total of 15 per cent of global travelers. These travelers appreciate quality of life, nature, and responsibility. They are open to new experiences, strive towards self-improvement, and – most importantly – have the financial means to travel. (Visit Finland 2016c; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2015.)

In brief, Finland is regarded as a destination for small-scale, individualized tourism aimed at seasoned travelers. In its straight-forwardness and authenticity, Finland is not something for everyone. However, through careful planning, productization, and marketing the Finnish tourism industry may have a bright future ahead of it. These actions require a thorough understanding of Finland's target markets and the needs and desires of potential visitors. The next chapter delves into the traveling habits and motivations of Spanish tourists.

## **6 The Spanish tourist**

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of Spain as a market for outbound tourism, as well as the travel habits and motivations of Spanish tourists. The first part briefly explores the current state of the Spanish outbound tourism market. The second part studies the prevailing travel patterns and habits of Spanish tourists. After that, the attitudes and demeanors of Spanish consumers towards social media are examined. The last two parts are dedicated to the more specific travel motivations of Spanish tourists, as well as their experiences and feelings towards Finland as a holiday destination.

### **6.1 The Spanish market for outbound tourism**

Spain, or Kingdom of Spain (*Reino de España*), is a parliamentary monarchy located on the Iberian Peninsula in southwestern Europe. The country was initially occupied by Iberians, Celts, and Basques. Later on, its development was also affected by Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths, and Moors. (Morrison & Conaway 2006) Spain has a population of roughly 48 million inhabitants and about 74 percent of them speak Castilian Spanish as their native tongue (Central Intelligence Agency 2017). In addition to Castilian (also referred to as *español*, or *castellano*), the country has several other official regional languages: the Basques of the north, the Galicians of the northwest and the Catalans of the northeast all speak their own languages. Some of the numerous dialects include Andalusian, Valencian, Aragonese, Navarrese and a Canary Islands Spanish. Worldwide, Spanish is one of the most commonly spoken languages, with an estimated 350 million speakers (Morrison & Conaway 2006).

Spain is often regarded as the top touristic destination in Europe. However, many seem to forget that the traffic is not only inbound. In 2016, Spanish citizens made almost 16 million trips abroad with more than 13 billion euros spent in travel-related expenditures. Over 54 percent of these trips were motivated by leisure, recreation, and holidays. Additionally, the Spanish holiday expenditure grew by 16.5 per cent compared to the previous year. (Spanish Statistical Office 2017.) Table 5 demonstrates the division of the Spanish tourism expenditure abroad in 2016:

<b>Tourism spending by destination</b>	<b>Spending in 2016 (€m)</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total spending</b>	<u>13,233.7</u>	<u>100.0</u>
<b>Package holidays</b>	2,309.9	17.5
<b>Acommodation</b>	2,513.1	19.0
<b>Transportation</b>	3,900.4	29.5
<b>Bars and restaurants</b>	2,424.5	18.3
<b>Activities</b>	614.0	4.6
<b>Durable goods</b>	81.9	0.6
<b>Others</b>	1,389.8	10.5

Table 5. Division of Spanish tourism expenditure abroad in 2016 (Spanish Statistical Office 2017)

To date, Spain is enjoying a strong recovery from a deep period of recession and in its third year of expansion, the country's GDP is almost back to its 2008 pre-crisis peak. A wide-ranging agenda of structural reforms has laid the ground for robust economic recovery and declining unemployment rate. In fact, in 2016 the Spanish economy expanded by 3.2 per cent, well above the euro area average, while employment kept rising approximately 3 per cent per year. While the unemployment rate has come down significantly from its peak of 26 per cent in 2013, it still remains high at nearly 19 per cent, particularly among young adults and the long-term unemployed. However, improving financial conditions, rising incomes, tax reductions, low oil prices, and relatively high job creation have all substantially boosted consumer spending among the Spanish. (European Commission 2017.) The Spanish economy is recovering, and the Spanish market for outbound tourism is following suit.

## 6.2 Spanish travel habits

Growing economic confidence on the part of Spanish consumers has caused a notable increase in leisure travel. In fact, roughly one third of Spaniards claims that traveling is one of their principal aspirations in life. (Marketing de Turismo 2016.) According to a 2009 study by Camarero, leisure time is a significant source of satisfaction for Spanish people. Traveling is precisely the one activity that more Spaniards would like to engage in.

In 2016, the Spanish made a total of 182 million trips, which accounted for roughly 780,3 million overnight stays. Spaniards love their own beaches, mountains, and cities, for which the vast majority, a little over 91 per cent, of these trips occurred

within the national territory of Spain. However, when a Spanish tourist travels abroad, he or she is also inclined to spend more money: while the average daily budget for domestic trips was roughly 45 euros, the average Spanish tourist spends about 96 euros per day abroad. The average expenditure per person for outbound trips was approximately 841 euros. (Spanish Statistical Office 2017.) Out of Spanish outbound travel, an overwhelming majority is directed to other European countries, with France, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Germany receiving most of the traffic (AIMC Marcas 2015).

In Spain, the main holiday season takes place from mid-July until mid-September, with August being the busiest of holiday months. At the same time, Christmas and Eastern trips are rising in popularity. (Tourspain 2015.) In addition, there are numerous other national and regional holidays which many travelers combine with weekends – the concept of *punte*, which signifies long weekend, is fairly important to the Spanish holiday culture. During their stays abroad, the Spanish prefer to stay at hotels (52.2 per cent) or at the homes of friends and family (26.9 per cent). A little under 10 per cent favor vacation rentals. The Spanish typically prefer to plan their travels independently, as only 13 per cent of trips are so-called package holidays. (Spanish Statistical Office 2015.) The majority of Spanish tourists originate from the autonomous communities of Madrid (18.6 per cent), Andalusia (15.1 per cent), and Catalonia (14.5 per cent) (Spanish Statistical Office 2017).

For the Spanish, the principal motives for travel are generally leisure or visiting family and friends (Spanish Statistical Office 2017). There is also a number of new travel segments which are growing in popularity: these include trips motivated by the realization of various outdoor activities and sports (Camarero 2009). In addition, city holidays are an emerging form of travel for the Spanish. These trips are often characterized by rapid decision-making and inexpensive direct flights. In fact, price is one of the key determinants for Spanish tourists – however, they are generally more willing to invest in entertainment and nightlife. All-inclusive holidays are also seen as an attractive alternative. Organized bus tours, nature-based travel, and cruises are other areas of interest for the Spanish tourist. (MEK 2011.) It should be noted that less than 50 per cent of Spaniards



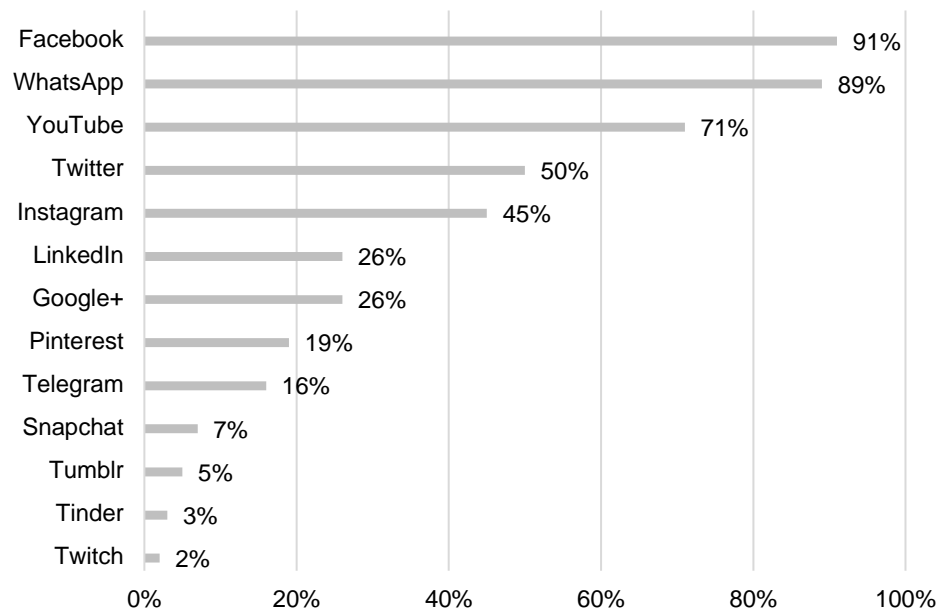
between the ages of 18 and 65 speak English (Spanish Statistical Office 2012). As a result, all travel-related material should be available in Spanish. When it comes to marketing communications, the Spanish tourist is generally not interested in cold hard facts – instead, all materials should incorporate bold colors, images, videos, and lively depictions of the destination (MEK 2011).

### **6.3 Social media in Spain**

Spain is among the countries with the highest level of social media engagement in the world – in fact, the average Spaniard connects to 6.2 social media platforms in a week. In comparison, the European average is roughly 5.4, while worldwide people connect to about 4.8 platforms a week. Engagement in social networks is not only common among the young Spaniards – even people between the ages of 54 and 65 are present on at least 4 social media platforms. In fact, the daily use of social medias in Spain increased by almost 15 per cent from 2015 to 2016. (RTVE 2016.)

According to a 2017 study by IAB Spain, roughly 86 per cent of Spanish internet users between the ages of 16 and 65 use social media. This accounts for 19.2 million social media users in the country. As reported by the study, both Spanish men and women use social networks equally as much, with the average social media user being about 39 years of age and living in a household composed of 2.9 members. 46 per cent have acquired higher education, with 35 per cent indicating secondary studies as their highest achieved level of education. 66 per cent are currently employed.

Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter are the four largest social networks in Spain (Graph 3). However, Instagram is gaining the most momentum, particularly among females between the ages of 16 and 45. While WhatsApp and YouTube are equally popular among both sexes, Facebook is particularly enjoyed by Spanish women, with Spanish men showing preference to Twitter. Snapchat, Tumblr, and other smaller platforms are mainly used by people under the age of 30. (IAB Spain 2017)



Graph 3. Social media usage in Spain 2017 (IAB Spain 2017)

Travel and tourism are among the most followed topics on the Internet (Kavoura & Stavrianeas 2015). For the Spanish, the main reason for following a brand on social media is because it publishes content that they personally find interesting or valuable (IAB Spain 2017). Approximately one fifth of Spanish internet users follow travel and tourism related content online, while over 65 per cent admit that their purchase decisions are affected by social media (Marketing de Turismo 2016). 53 per cent of Spanish social media users tend to search for information on social networks prior to making a purchase, with 39 per cent expressing their post-purchase reactions on social media. The two main channels for such activities are Facebook and YouTube. (IAB Spain 2017.)

In a 2016 study, the Spanish market research consultancy The Cocktail Analysis discovered four profiles for people who follow brands on social media (Figure 8). These profiles are based on the users' interaction with and interest towards brands on social networks. The first group are the outsiders, whose relationships with brands are either at the very initial stages or completely non-existent. The second group consists of the curious, who follow brand on social media in order to keep up with trends and news. The third group, the clients, are those social media users who follow a brand with the intention of getting to know its offering at a more profound level. Lastly, the enthusiasts follow brands on social media

because they identify with the brand's image and find value in the content that it delivers.

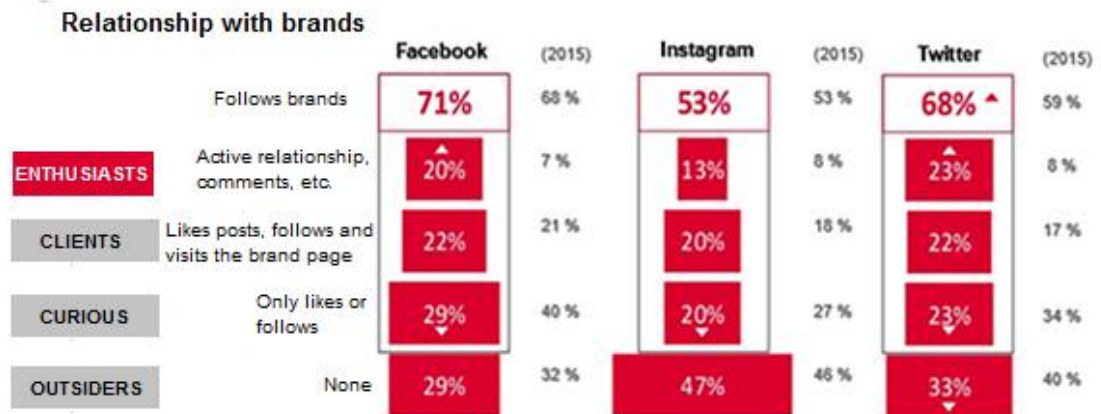


Figure 8. The four profiles of Spanish social media users (The Cocktail Analysis 2016)

As seen in Figure 8, the share of Spanish social media users who follow and actively engage with brands on social networks has increased from 2015. It can also be seen that the share of outsiders on Instagram is far greater than on Facebook or Twitter. These statistics are consistent with the findings of IAB Spain (2017), which indicate that Facebook is the prominent platform when it comes to engagement with brand content. However, brand owners and marketers alike should always keep in mind that the principal utility of social networks for the Spanish is to keep in touch with friends and socialize. When it comes to brand content, The Cocktail Analysis (2016) underlines three important characteristics: pertinence, relevance, and authenticity. This means that any marketing messages should always be adapted to fit the candid, real-time social media setting.

#### 6.4 Motivations of Spanish tourists

While Spain's history and culture are made up of a rich mix of diverse elements, there are still a few things that the country's inhabitants have in common, such as a natural sociability and an innate zest for life. As a rule, Spaniards put just as much energy into enjoying life as they do into their work. It is not uncommon to bend one's work to fit the demands of social life. (DK Eyewitness Travel 2017.) Travel and tourism are among those activities that bring the most joy to citizens

of modern societies. Tourism has become an avenue for psychological depletion through self-enhancement, relaxation, and exploration.

A 2008 study by Castaño in collaboration with the Spanish department store giant El Corte Inglés attempted to evaluate the motivations and behaviors of tourists with regard to the selection of holiday destinations. As a result, the study identified the following profiles of Spanish tourists:

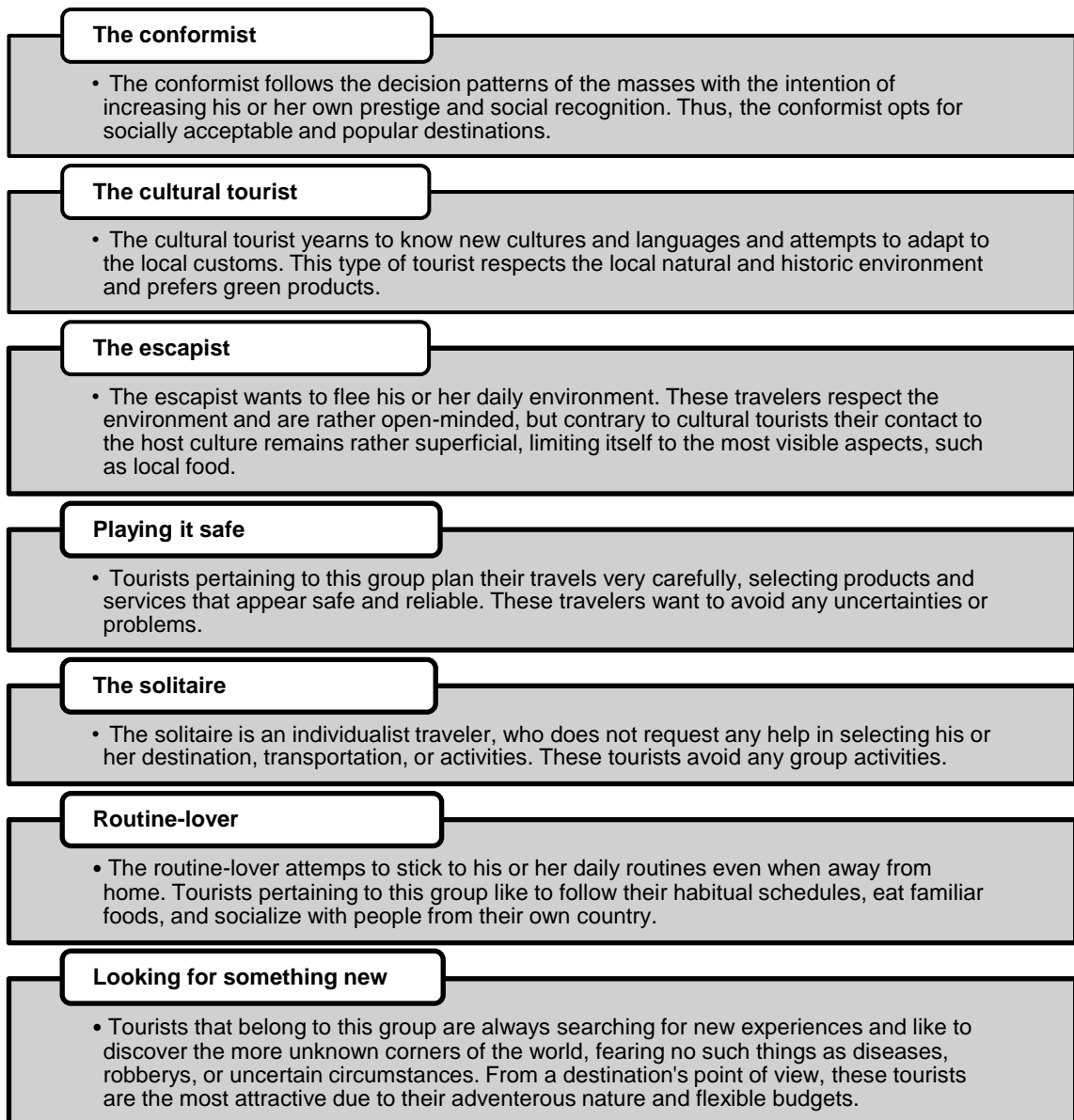


Figure 9. The profiles of Spanish tourists adapted from Castaño 2009

In addition to Castaño's research, others have also tried to study and analyze the motivations behind Spanish outbound tourism. In 2015, the Spanish consultant Brain Trust published a study which presented seven archetypes of Spanish

tourists (Figure 10). The study did not only look at sociodemographic variables, but intended to understand the diverse forms of dreaming, booking, enjoying and sharing tourism experiences amongst the seven homogenous tourist groups. (La Razón 2015.)



Figure 10. Seven archetypes of Spanish tourists adapted from La Razón 2015

The first group are the so-called urban tourists. These travelers are motivated by their interest to see new, up-and-coming destinations, combined with the possibility of learning about their culture and history. Urban tourists often originate from urban environments, and they also like to visit other metropolitan areas of the world. This groups represents the upper middle class of the Spanish society, and consists mostly of childless middle-aged couples. The second group, visitors, also form part of the Spanish upper middle class, but their approach to tourism is slightly different in the sense that they view traveling as a way of self-development and growth. This group is motivated by new experiences and knowledge, but also some form of relaxation. (La Razón 2015.)

The third group, gourmet, consists of tourists who mostly enjoy traveling within Spain's national territory. These travelers appreciate nature, beautiful sceneries, and culinary experiences. Members of this group are mostly older people from the Spanish middle class. The fourth group is made up of insatiable young Spaniards who travel a lot. These travelers are motivated by their desire to be so-called "global citizens". They are seeking to connect with locals and see as

many destinations as possible. While the frequency of travel may be high for this group, their budgets are generally considerably lower. However, by volume of travel the insatiable tourists form the largest segment of Spanish tourists, and due to their young age, they also hold the most potential for growth. (La Razón 2015.)

The fifth group includes tourists who still think of travel in the traditional way. They want everything resolved, for which they typically purchase ready-made holiday packages. The main motivation for these tourists is to relax and be entertained without having to worry about the formalities or the arrangements of travel, as they are often families with underage children. This group does not travel a lot, but its members tend to prefer domestic beach destinations. The sixth group, beachgoers, shares a lot of these characteristics, with the exception that its members like to book separate services through online agencies. Beachgoers are also motivated by the idea of relaxation and disconnecting from the world. The last segment, opportunists, consists of tourists who tend to travel by car and stay at the homes of friends and relatives. These trips are generally motivated by relaxation, enjoyment of rural environments, and regional festivities. From the industry's perspective, the opportunists are the least valuable segment as they refrain from consuming traditional tourist products or services. (La Razón 2015.)

## **6.5 Spanish tourists in Finland**

The expectations and experiences of Spanish tourists with regard to Finland have already been studied to some extent. According to a 2014 study by Visit Finland, Spanish people that visit Finland expect to experience new things and are interested in combining nature and city life. Spanish tourists enjoy museums, historic sights, and relaxing treatments in spas relatively more than other Europeans. Another study from 2004 attempted to investigate the associations Spanish people had about Finland. According to the study, the principal associations included words like cold, snow, ice, and North. Interestingly enough, less than three percent of the respondents named such things as lakes, reindeers, or beautiful landscapes, which many generally view as some of Finland's main attractions. The study also demonstrated that the Spanish often confuse Finland with its Scandinavian neighbors. (Hänninen 2004.)

In 2016, Spanish tourists spend about 126 000 nights in Finland (Visit Finland 2017d). This number pales in comparison to the 304 000 overnight stays of the Spanish in Norway in the same year (Innovation Norway 2017). Even though the Finnish figure signifies an 18 per cent increase from the previous year, the country lags far behind its Nordic companions (Visit Finland 2017d). While Europe's share of Spanish outbound travel is a little under 80 per cent, Finland's share is only 0.3 per cent. Still, Spanish tourists account for 2 per cent of Finland's total tourism income. (Visit Finland 2016a.)

Majority of Spanish tourists spend at least 4 days in Finland, with an average trip duration of 6.8 nights. In 2015, 61 per cent of Spanish tourists were first-time visitors. (Visit Finland 2016a) A vast majority of Spaniards plan and reserve their trip entirely on their own, with only about 15 per cent entrusting the help of travel agencies. In 2016, the average Spaniard spent about 582 euros during his or her stay in Finland. (Visit Finland 2017e.) The division of costs is presented in Table 6:

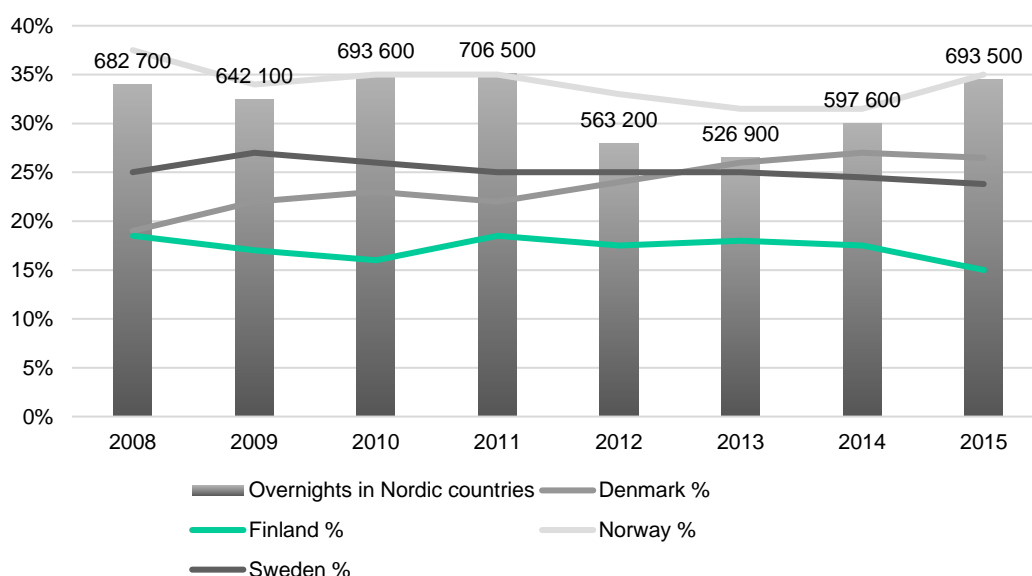
<b>Tourist spending by destination</b>	<b>Spending in 2016 €</b>	<b>Change from 2015 (%)</b>	<b>Actual change (€)</b>
Pre-trip expenses	115	-1.7%	-2
Product purchases	96	+18.5%	+15
Services	371	+8.2%	+28
Total expenses / trip	582	+7.6%	+41
Total expenses / day	66	+43.5%	+20

Table 6. Division of spending for Spanish tourists in Finland (Visit Finland 2017e)

Majority of Spanish tourists travel to Helsinki and its surrounding areas. In 2016, almost 55 per cent of Spanish visitors stayed in the capital region, with 24 per cent heading to the Finnish Lakeland, 11 per cent to the archipelago, and only 10 per cent to Lapland. (Visit Finland 2017e.) This division can, however, be explained by the fact roughly 56 per cent of the Spanish overnight stays occurred during the summer season, with August being the most popular month of the year. During the winter season, Lapland tends to gather more traffic, particularly during December. (Visit Finland 2016a.)

When it comes to the Spanish outbound tourism market, Finland's main competitors include the Nordics, the Baltics, and Russia. Norway, Sweden, and Iceland have been gathering a lot of Spanish media and trade attention as a result of their intensive marketing activities in the country. Norway's tourism product is rather straightforward and approachable, as most Spaniards are aware of the country's fjords and beautiful landscapes. Sweden has done a remarkable job at marketing its capital Stockholm as the modern trend-setter of Northern Europe, however, the country's winter offering cannot quite measure to that of Finland's. Iceland is focusing its marketing efforts on the more venturesome and experienced Spanish tourist, a target group that may hold the highest potential also for Finland. The Baltics are seen as an attractive alternative by the more price-conscious Spaniards. However, one of their greatest weaknesses are fluctuations in prices and service quality. (MEK 2011.)

In 2015, around every seventh overnight stay of the Spanish in the Nordics was registered in Finland. As seen in Graph 4, the number of Spanish overnights in the Nordic countries dropped significantly during the deepest period of recession in 2012-2013, but by 2015 this figure had almost reached its 2011 pre-crisis level.



Graph 4. Overnights of Spanish visitors in Nordic countries (Visit Finland 2016c)

Finland's proximity to other North and East European countries appears to be a significant pull factor on the Spanish market. In 2015, 65 per cent of Spanish



visitors in Finland also traveled to another country during their trip. Almost every third of Spanish tourists also visited Estonia, while 12 per cent traveled to Sweden. Norway, Denmark, and Russia each respectively received visits from roughly 4 per cent of the Spanish visitors in Finland. Interestingly, the Baltics attracted even more traffic, with 8 per cent of Spanish tourists extending their trip to Latvia, and 5 per cent to Lithuania. (Visit Finland 2016a.)

Overall, Spanish tourists have been highly satisfied with Finland's tourism offering. Up to 90 per cent of Spanish visitors express willingness to recommend Finland to their friends and family (Visit Finland 2017e). When it comes to Finland's tourism product, Spanish tourists generally find Finnish cultural attractions the most interesting experiences in the country. The next most interesting aspects include summer activities on land, Finnish sauna, and the Finnish archipelago. (Visit Finland 2016a.) In general, Finland holds an eminently positive image in the minds of Spanish consumers. The success of Finnish corporations, technological innovations, and the reputation of the Finnish educational system have all contributed to Finland's prestige on the Spanish market. Finnish design and art are also becoming more and more appealing in the eyes of Spanish consumers. (Finpro 2010.f) Slowly but surely Finland is gaining momentum on the Spanish outbound tourism market: however, in order to measure up to the competition, there is a need for bolder moves and more effectively and precisely targeted marketing strategies.

## **7 Research methodology**

The research for this thesis was conducted in the form of an online survey combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The survey was shared on several social media communities frequented by Spanish nationals. 703 respondents were asked to evaluate their attitudes towards travel as well as brand content on social media. Respondents were also shown collections of Finland-themed images and asked to indicate preference for one of them. The objective of the survey was to find out what kind of themes and imagery the respondents found the most captivating, and combine this knowledge with the

participants' background information to enable cross-tabulation and the identification of significant segmentation opportunities.

The aim of the survey was to assess Spanish social media users' attitudes towards different aspects of the Finnish tourism product. In addition to multiple-choice questions, the survey included a few open-ended questions so as to encourage the respondents to give full, meaningful answers. In the first part of the survey, participants were asked about their past holiday experiences and principal motives for travel. The second part consisted of questions regarding the respondents' use of social media as well as their stance towards brand content on social networks. The last part of the survey was intended to evaluate the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards Finland. To achieve this, respondents were shown various Finland-themed images pertaining to the three major marketing themes identified by Visit Finland. However, to facilitate easier analysis of the results, each of these themes was further divided into two sub-categories:



Figure 11. Marketing themes and their sub-categories

The survey questions were designed to be as neutral as possible yet descriptive enough to achieve validity for the research. Distributing the link to the survey on social media ensured that all subjects had at least some type of experience with social networks. However, it should be noted that the use of a non-probability sampling technique may have led to sample selection bias as the subjects may have not formed a perfectly accurate representation of the population – that is, all Spanish social media users. Additionally, as the research was conducted in the form of an online survey, there was less control over the situation in which the participants answered the questions. As such, there was no way of verifying that all answers were perfectly honest, or even if the respondents understood the

questions in the intended way. In addition, a written online survey did not give respondents as much leeway in their answers as a traditional interview could have. However, the use of this particular method made it possible to include a much larger portion of the population in the sample. Online surveys serve as an effective tool for collecting large amounts of data within a significantly shortened time period. Additionally, the results of an online survey are quick and easy to analyze due to automation in data input and handling.

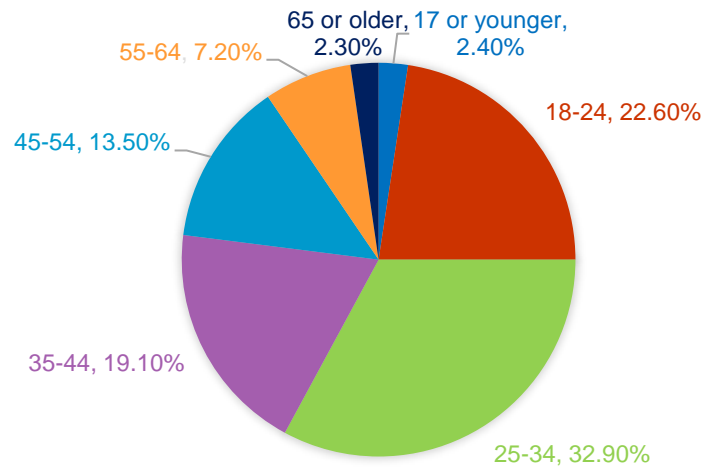
After data collection, data analysis was carried out by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Software. The tool was chosen because it made the process of analyzing large amounts of versatile quantitative data effective, flexible, and smooth. It also made it easy to generate graphical presentations of survey data and allowed for deeper analysis of the relationships between responses to diverse questions. For the qualitative data generated by the survey, word clouds were produced in order to add clarity to the analysis of the results and to emphasize the frequency of certain words in the open-ended responses of the participants.

## **8 Research results**

The following chapter displays the results of the survey and attempts to analyze them in order to fulfill the research objective and find answers to the research questions. The results are presented in four subchapters that all deal with different areas included in the survey. Additionally, there is a fifth subchapter dedicated entirely to the analysis of the research results.

### **8.1 Respondent background information**

In total, 703 respondents took part in the survey. 48.2 per cent of the respondents were female, and 51.8 per cent male. Graph 5 illustrates the age distribution of respondents:



Graph 5. Age distribution of respondents

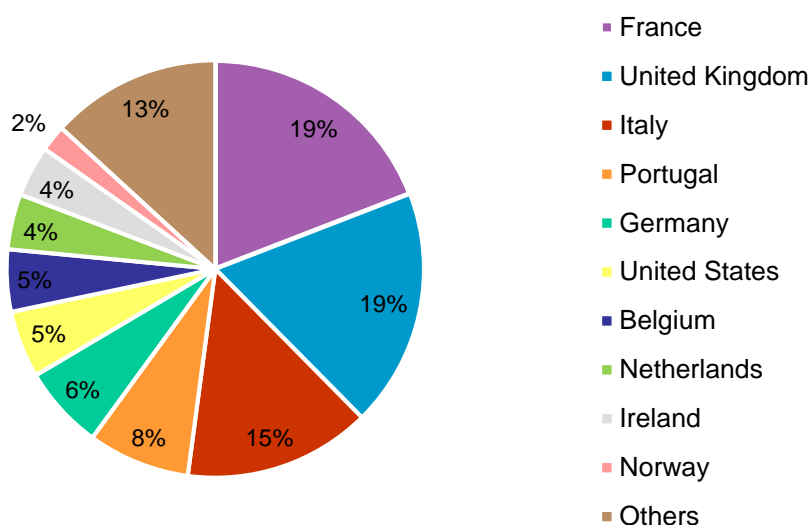
As seen in Graph 5, majority of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34, with the age groups of 18-24, 35-44, and 45-54 also representing a significant share. Based on the findings of the literature review, it can be concluded that in terms of gender and age this is a fairly accurate representation of Spanish social media users. Over 24 per cent of the respondents resided in the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Other popular regions included Catalonia (20 per cent), Valencian Community (18 per cent), Andalusia (15 per cent), and Region of Murcia (10 per cent). The remaining respondents were spread rather evenly among the rest of Spanish territories. Respondents residing outside of Spain (1.4 per cent) were excluded from the data analysis.

The majority of respondents (37 per cent) selected Bachelor's degree as their highest completed level of education. 24 per cent selected Spanish baccalaureate (equivalent to high school), 20 per cent secondary school, and 14 per cent a Master's degree. 3 per cent of respondents had a university post-graduate degree, with 2 per cent having finished only primary school. As far the composition of the respondents' households, 37 per cent reside in households of at least 4 people, with roughly a third living in three-member households. 21 per cent live with one other person, and 9 per cent claimed to live alone.

## 8.2 Travel habits

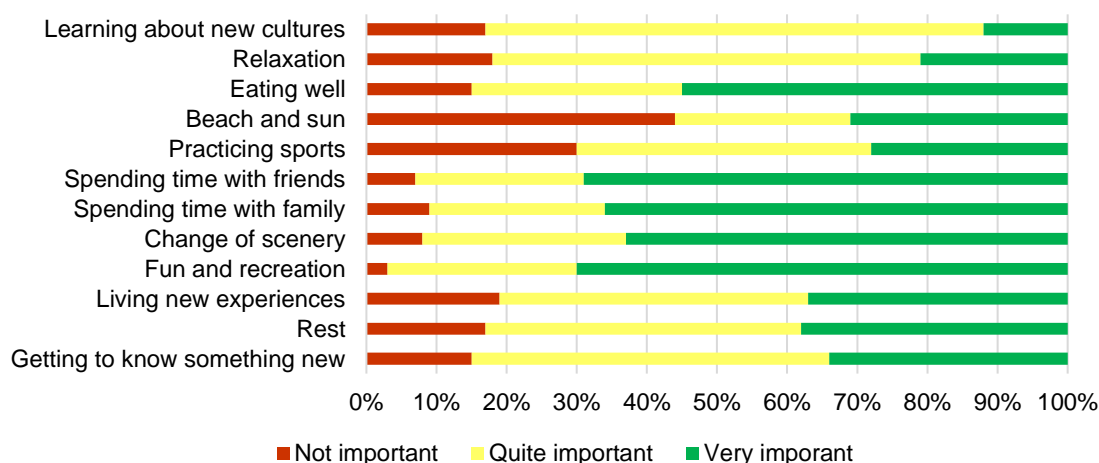
The first part of the survey had the objective of investigating the subjects' past travel experiences as well as their overall attitudes towards holiday destinations

and the activities they offer. In the first question, it was revealed that 61 per cent of respondents had traveled abroad for touristic purposes at least once in their life. A vast majority of these people, 74 per cent, affirmed that they had done so 1-4 times, with 20 per cent having taken a vacation abroad 5-10 times. Only 6 per cent indicated having done so more than 10 times. When asked to disclose the specific destinations of these trips, it became evident that European countries are the most popular, with United States being the only non-European country to make it to the top 10. The most visited destinations are presented in Graph 6:



Graph 6. Most visited destinations by respondents

In the next questions, participants were asked to indicate the importance they place on various motives when selecting a holiday destination. The results are presented in Graph 7:



Graph 7. Importance of motives for destination selection among respondents

As seen in Graph 7, fun and recreation, spending time with family and friends, and change of scenery were ranked as the most important motives for travel. The respondents' attitudes were the most divided when it came to beach and sun and practicing sports. Interestingly enough, there was a significant correlation between participants who had indicated that they had never gone on a holiday abroad before, and those who placed the most importance on beach and sun. This could be explained by the fact that people who appreciate such conditions have no need to travel any further, as Spain already boasts some of the finest beaches in the world. What is more, there was a clear correlation between respondents who selected learning about new cultures as one of their principal motives for destination selection, and those who had previously traveled to destinations which were not included in the top 10 countries visited by survey participants.

In the next question, participants were asked to think about the holiday of their dreams, and indicate which were the first destinations that came to their mind. The results are illustrated in Figure 12:

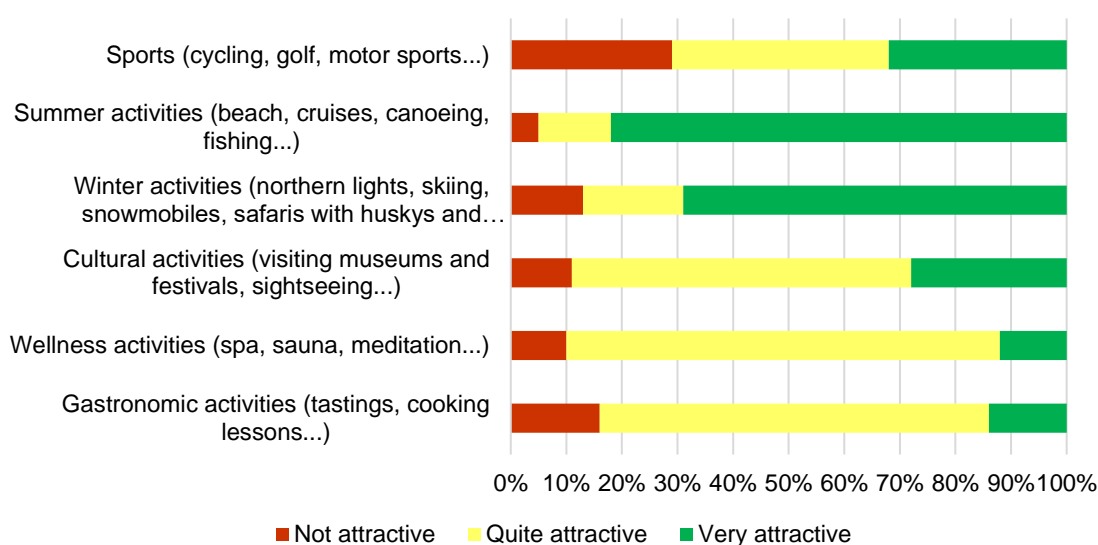


Figure 12. Respondents' dream destinations

Based on these results, the participants' dream destinations include many far-off countries, such as the United States, Australia, and Japan. It can also be detected that when speaking of European destinations, respondents often like to refer to specific cities as opposed to entire countries: for example, Paris and London were within the top 10 most mentioned destinations, while only a few respondents

spoke of France or the United Kingdom in general. Out of Finland's main competitors, Norway and Iceland were brought up the most. An important discovery was that Sweden as a country was mentioned only a few times more than Finland, however, its capital Stockholm was brought up multiple times. In fact, while referrals to other Nordics remained quite broad and unspecified, Sweden was the only country to receive specific attention with regard to its fashion, culture, and people.

In the fourth question, participants evaluated the attractiveness of various destination activities. These results can be observed in Graph 8:

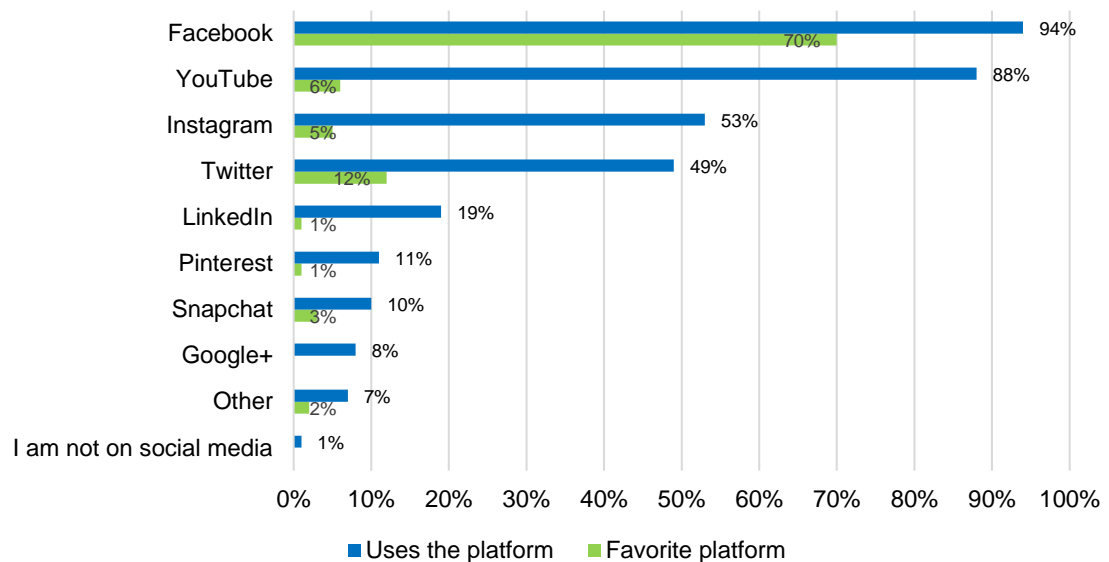


Graph 8. Attractiveness of destination activities among respondents

As seen in Graph 8, summer and winter activities were ranked as the most attractive destination activities. Sports divided the most opinions, with cultural, wellness, and gastronomic activities being predominantly evaluated as “quite attractive”. Cultural activities appeared the most attractive to respondents under the age of 35 with higher education and who live in households of 1-2 members, while wellness and gastronomic activities appealed the most to older respondents regardless of other demographic factors. Men under the age of 45 expressed the most interest in sports, with summer and winter activities intriguing a more universal audience.

### 8.3 Social media

The second part of the study intended to study the social media usage of the respondents. For this purpose, the participants were asked to disclose which social media platforms they use and which ones they would consider as their favorites. The popularity of different platforms can be seen in Graph 9:



Graph 9. Use of social media among respondents

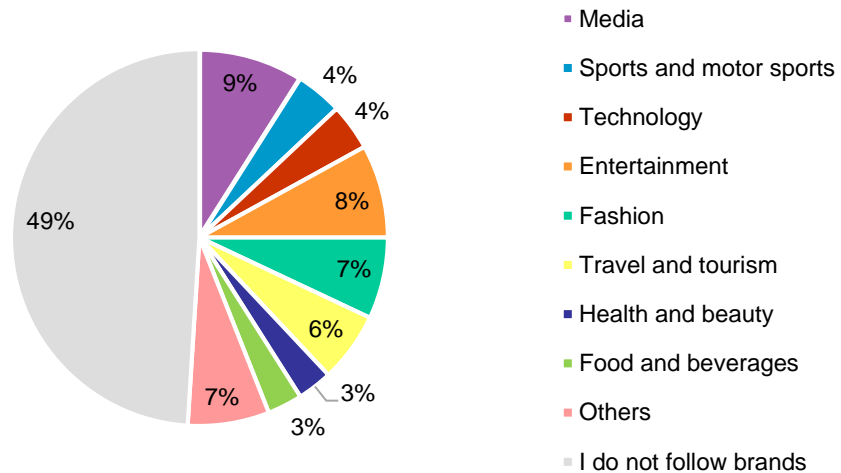
Facebook was named as both the most used as well as the preferred social media platform among all respondents. YouTube was the second most used, however, Twitter the second most favorite. While Facebook and YouTube were universally preferred, Twitter was particularly popular among highly educated men under the age of 35, with Instagram and Pinterest appealing to females across all age groups. Snapchat was equally popular among both sexes; however, an overwhelming majority of its users were under 25 years old.

In the next question, respondents were asked whether they follow brands on social media, to which 59 per cent responded affirmatively. After that, participants indicated what types of brands they like to follow (Graph 10).

As seen in Graph 10, the most followed brands have to do with media, entertainment, and fashion. Travel and tourism brands are the fourth most followed brands on social media. In the analysis of the results, there were some slight correlations between brand preferences and travel habits: for instance,

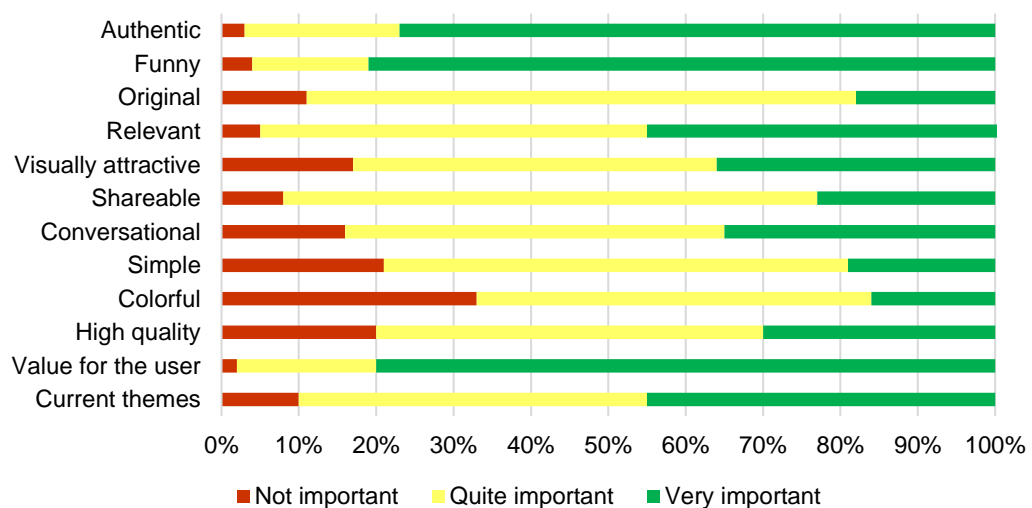


respondents following travel and tourism on social media also showed more interest in learning about new cultures and traveling to more uncommon destinations. Understandably, respondents who follow sports brands on social media also found destination activities involving sports more appealing. Participants who admitted to following travel and tourism brands on social media generally selected either Facebook or Instagram as their favorite social media platforms.



Graph 10. Types of brands followed by respondents on social media

The last question of this section dealt with participants' preferences for brand content on social media. Participants were asked to evaluate the importance of various brand content characteristics (Graph 11):



Graph 11. Importance of brand content characteristics

According to the results, authenticity, value for the user, and humor are the three most appreciated characteristics of brands' social media content. Other important aspects include the relevancy and shareability of the content, along with the incorporation of current themes. Colorfulness and high quality appear to be the least important characteristics. There were no significant correlations between content preferences and users of particular social media platforms, however, authenticity, originality, and shareability were particularly important to younger generations, while respondents over the age of 45 seemed to value appreciate high quality, conversational nature, and value for the user.

#### 8.4 Finland as a tourist destination

The last part of the survey explored the respondents' existing perceptions about Finland, their preferences towards particular themes and images, as well as how their perceptions can be potentially altered through the use of marketing communications. At first, participants were asked to type out the first associations that came to their mind when thinking of Finland as a holiday destination. The results are illustrated in Figure 13:

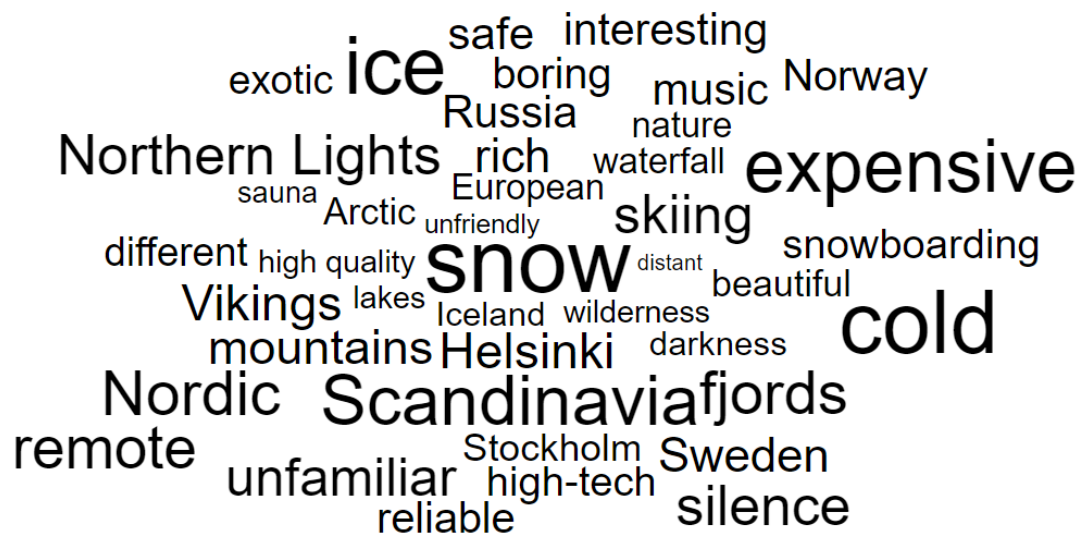
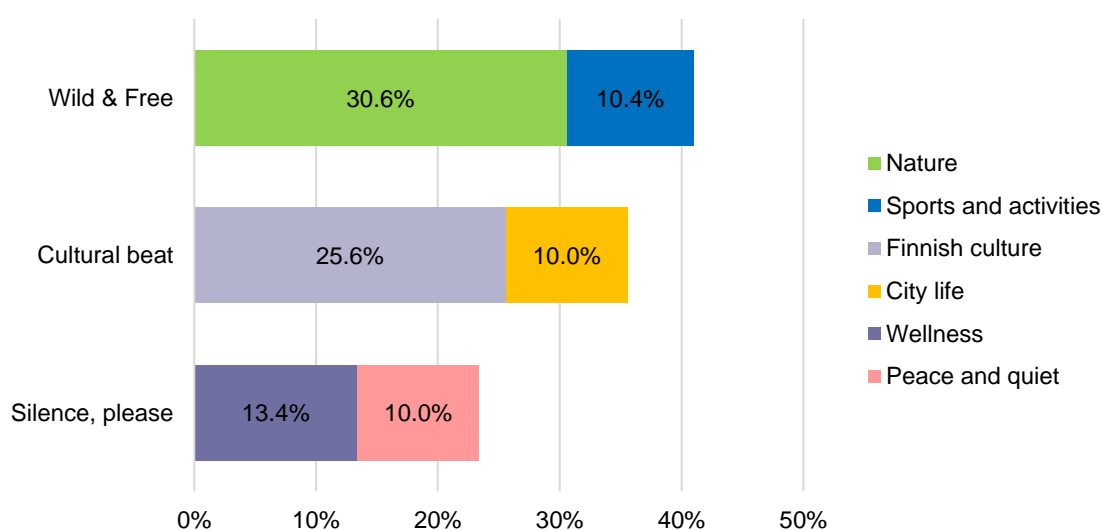


Figure 13. Respondents' associations about Finland

The most frequently mentioned words included snow, cold, ice, and expensive. Finland's neighboring countries – Sweden, Norway, and Russia – were also some of the most common associations among respondents. The results confirmed that Finland's image is rather undistinguished from the rest of the Nordics, as many respondents mentioned Scandinavia and referred to such things as fjords,

mountains, waterfalls, and Vikings. Words like unfamiliar, remote, and distant were also brought up frequently. Along with high price level, some of the other negative associations included adjectives such as boring and unfriendly. On a more positive note, many also described Finland as reliable, interesting, safe, and exotic. While some respondents were able to make reference to rather specific qualities of the country, such as the Northern Lights, heavy metal music, and sauna, most associations remained at a broader, more generic level. This comes to show that while Finland's image is for the most part positive, potential visitors' expectations and preconceptions do not still quite match the reality.

In the next part, respondents were shown a total of 5 series of images, each consisting of 4 distinct photographs representing the three main marketing themes of Visit Finland, along with their subcategories, as explained in the previous chapter. From of each series, respondents were asked to indicate preference for one image. In many visual preference surveys, participants are asked to rank and score images according to their preference: however, for the purpose of this research, it was decided that respondents would only click on the one image that they found the most appealing so as to make the survey process as smooth and convenient as possible, hence achieving a higher response rate. The images selected represent the diverse characteristics of Finland as a holiday destination, and one series of images could contain four images embodying four completely opposite features of the country.



Graph 12. Respondents' preference of Finland's marketing themes

As seen in Graph 12, overall the survey participants indicated the most preference to images pertaining to the category Wild & Free. However, when taking a closer look at the subcategories created for the purpose of this research, it can be noted that Finnish culture and Wellness were in fact preferred over Sports and activities. Furthermore, it is not enough to only look at the overall results at a superficial level: there were detectable distinctions between various respondent categories. While Northern Lights and other beautiful landscapes seemed to appeal to almost everyone, there were some significant correlations between respondent background information and their reactions to the image categories. For example, younger respondents showed clear preference to more exotic or even extreme images including reindeers, snowmobiles, or landscapes covered with thick layers of snow. Women over the age of 35 were particularly attracted to the Wellness category demonstrating the Finnish sauna and a jacuzzi. City life and Finnish culture appealed the most to more experienced, highly-educated travelers. Further analysis of these results can be found in the last part of this chapter.

After seeing and evaluating the images, respondents were asked once again to describe their perceptions of Finland as a tourist destination. The results are demonstrated in Figure 14:



Figure 14. Respondents' perceptions about Finland at the end of the survey

When comparing these perceptions to the ones brought up earlier, significant differences can be detected. Firstly, the words beautiful, nature, landscape, and exotic were now mentioned far more frequently. Secondly, respondents' associations became more specific, as the mentions of neighboring countries and their attractions declined notably. Lastly, an entirely new set of words appeared: respondents were now describing Finland's greenness, versatility, and colorfulness. While coldness, remoteness, and expensiveness were still among the most common associations, the pool of adjectives was now far more diverse as the respondents became familiarized with Finland's tourism offering. For example, participants who had previously been limited to describing Finland's high price level and remote location were now able to expand their depiction by including more positive adjectives. Furthermore, respondents whose initial main associations had to do with coldness and ice were now able to see that Finland is not only a winter destination. This only comes to show the potential of effective marketing communications in the reshaping of consumer preconceptions.

## **8.5 Analysis of the results**

Overall, the results of the survey were very much in accordance with the findings of the literature review. Not every Spanish national represents the ideal customer of the Finnish tourism product, however, there are several significant niche markets which all require personalized attention due to their differing motivations and expectations with regard to travel and holidays. Based on the survey results, three important target groups can be identified:

1) Culture and travel enthusiasts. This group consists of mainly 25-44-year-old highly-educated individuals who live in two-member households, and for the most part do not have any children. A vast majority of them reside in the metropolitan areas of Spain, such as the Community of Madrid and Catalonia. These travel enthusiasts have gone on a vacation abroad at least 5 times, and have already visited the most popular destinations of Europe, or even outside Europe – in fact, some of the members of this group have already visited Finland's neighboring countries. Their main motivations for travel are getting to know something new, and they enjoy various cultural activities, such as sightseeing, festivals, and museum visits. Most members of this group already follow travel and tourism

brands on social media, and they value high-quality, visually attractive brand content that deals with current themes. This group is mostly present on Facebook, but the men tend to show more preference to Twitter, while Instagram and Pinterest are particularly popular among the women. While the representatives of this group mainly prefer images related to culture and city life, the women are also attracted to wellness themes. As a result, the most appropriate marketing themes for this segment are Cultural Beat and, to a smaller extent, Silence, please.

2) Millennials. This group is composed of the younger generation of Spaniards, who either live alone or with family. These individuals have generally already finished high school, or may even hold a Bachelor's degree. Majority of this group's representatives have traveled abroad at least once, and mainly to European destinations. Their main motivation for travel is to spend time with friends, live new experiences, and to have a good time. Out of all the identified segments, millennials express the most interest in sports and other types of active recreation. However, they are also attracted by city life and certain cultural activities. Representatives of this group view Finland as an exotic and beautiful destination, however, they do have some reservations about the high price level. This group is mostly active on Facebook, but also thoroughly enjoy YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, and other smaller social media platforms. They follow a wide variety of brands on social media, but mainly ones related to sports, technology, fashion, and entertainment. Millennials prefer authentic, funny, and shareable brand content that also offers value to the followers. The best suited marketing theme for this target group is Wild & Free, however, there are also aspects of Cultural Beat that appeal to this segment.

3) Families. While not every single Spanish family is the ideal target for Finland's destination marketing, there is a small, yet noteworthy family-based audience with a solid interest in travel. The best way to reach this segment is to target 35-44-year-old women, who live in households of 3 or more people, and have at least some previous experience in travel. Their main motivations for travel include spending time with family, eating well, and change of scenery, and they express interest in both summer and winter activities. On social media, they are

predominantly present on Facebook, and enjoy brand content that deals with entertainment and health and beauty. For this group, it is important that the content offers some type of value for the user, but is also conversational in nature. This group's main associations about Finland have to do with safety, cleanliness, and reliability. They are mainly attracted to beautiful landscapes and activities in the Finnish nature, but are also interested in the concept of Finnish Christmas. As a result, the most suitable marketing theme for this segment is Wild & Free, but also Cultural Beat with its focus on Finnish Christmas traditions.

## **9 Conclusions**

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world with an immense global economic contribution. The industry is characterized by its dynamic and highly competitive nature. As competition intensifies, consumers of tourism products expect even more tailor-made solutions to fulfill their unique needs. What is more, the complexity and intangibility of the tourism product makes it one of the most challenging products to sell and market.

With the rise of information technologies, consumers have completely changed their habits regarding travel and tourism. As a result, destination marketers need to keep pace and adjust their own strategies to fit the behaviors of their target markets. With social media, potential visitors can be reached far more effectively and quicker than ever before. By investing some time and effort in creating a presence on social networks, destination marketers can reap the benefits of increased engagement and enhanced emotional connections, both of which are some of the most fundamental components of tourist decision-making.

Even though inbound tourism to Finland has been on the rise for several years now, the country still lags far behind its Nordic competitors. With its beautiful landscapes, pristine nature, and peculiar culture, Finland has a lot to offer to potential visitors. By leveraging social media, Finnish destination marketers can spread their message to well-defined target audiences more cost-effectively and precisely than before. Potential visitors can be targeted based on demographics, interests, and both online and offline behavior. As a result, marketing messages

can be highly customized to meet the specific demands and expectations of each market segment.

Spain, one of the largest countries in Europe, is enjoying a strong recovery from a deep period of recession. As the Spanish economy recovers, the Spanish market for outbound tourism follows suit. Growing economic confidence on the part of Spanish consumer has led to a notable increase in recreational travel. In fact, many Spaniards claim that traveling is one of their greatest aspirations in life. Spain is also among the countries with the highest level of social media engagement in the world, with many residents using social networks to keep up with news and trends related to travel and tourism.

The objective of this thesis was to explore how social media can be leveraged in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists. Therefore, the main research question was formed as follows:

- *How can social media be leveraged in marketing Finland as a holiday destination to Spanish tourists?*

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, three supporting sub-questions were introduced:

1. *What kind of travel-related content attracts the attention of Spanish social media users?*
2. *Which of Finland's attributes as a holiday destination appeal the most to the Spanish?*
3. *What kind of segmentation opportunities exist among Spanish social media users with respect to travel-related content and the use of different platforms?*

With the objective of finding answers to the research questions, an online survey was conducted. 703 Spanish social media users were asked to evaluate their attitudes towards travel as well as brand content on social media. Respondents were also shown collections of Finland-themed images and asked to indicate preference for the ones they found the most appealing. Based on survey results, three market segments were detected:



1. Culture and travel enthusiasts
2. Millennials
3. Families

Each of these segments present substantial potential for the Finnish tourism industry. They express interest in travel and are attracted to various qualities of the Finnish tourism product. Each segment can be reached through social media, and for the most part they hold a positive attitude towards brand content, provided that it matches their specific interests and preferences. Finnish destination marketers can target these segments based on their demographics (such as age, household composition, level of education, and place of residence), interests (such as travel, sports, culture, or any of the other identified interest areas), or behaviors (leisure travelers, frequent flyers, in-market behavior, and so on). For each segment, recommendations were given regarding their preference for Finland-themed content. As a result, Finnish destination marketers can deliver each target group precisely the type of content they find the most engaging and attractive, resultantly improving Finland's image on the Spanish outbound tourism market as well as establishing emotional connections between Finland and its core target audiences.

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## Appendix 1. Survey questions (English translation)

### 1. Travel habits

1.1 How many times have you gone on a holiday abroad, and to which countries?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Between 1 to 4 times
- ☐ Between 5 to 10 times
- ☐ More than 10 times

Which countries? \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Please indicate how important the following motives are to you when selecting a holiday destination.

	Not important	Quite important	Very important
Getting to know something new	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Living new experiences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fun and recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change of scenery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spending time with family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spending time with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practicing sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beach and sun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eating well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relaxation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning about new cultures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.3 If you think about the holiday of your dreams, which are the first destinations that come to your mind? \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 How attractive would you evaluate the following activities?

	Not attractive	Quite attractive	Very attractive
Sports (cycling, golf, motor sports...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer activities (beach, cruises, canoeing, fishing...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Winter activities (northern lights, skiing, snowmobiles, safaris with huskys and reindeers...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural activities (visiting museums and festivals, sightseeing...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wellness activities (spa, sauna, meditation...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Gastronomic activities (tastings, cooking lessons...)

☐

☐

☐

## **2. Social media**

### 2.1 Which social networks do you use?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Google+
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I am not on social media

### 2.2 What is your favorite social network?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Google+
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I am not on social media

### 2.3 Do you follow brands on social media?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

### 2.4 What types of brands do you follow on social media?

- ☐ Media
- ☐ Sports and motor sports
- ☐ Technology
- ☐ Entertainment
- ☐ Fashion

- ☐ Travel and tourism
- ☐ Health and beauty
- ☐ Food and beverages
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I do not follow brands

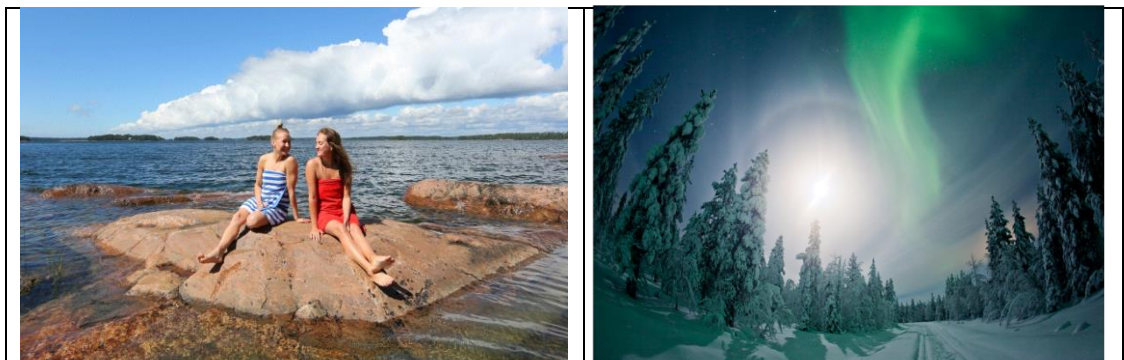
2.5 When it comes to following a brand on social media, how important do you consider the following characteristics of brand content?

	Not important	Quite important	Very important
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authentic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Funny	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Original	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visually attractive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shareable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Simple	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Colorful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value for the user	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Current themes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 3. Finland as a tourist destination

3.1 If you think about Finland as a tourist destination, what are the first associations that come to your mind? \_\_\_\_\_

3.2.1 Which one of the following images draws your attention the most?





3.2.2 Which one of the following images draws your attention the most?



3.2.3 Which one of the following images draws your attention the most?







3.2.4 Which one of the following images draws your attention the most?



3.2.5 Which one of the following images draws your attention the most?





3.3 After having seen these images, how would you describe Finland as a tourist destination in your own words? \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Demographics

4.1 To which of the following age groups do you belong?

- ☐ 17 or younger
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 or older

4.2 Sex:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

4.3 Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4 o más

4.4 Autonomous Community of residence:

- ☐ Andalusia
- ☐ Aragon
- ☐ Asturias
- ☐ Balearic Islands
- ☐ Canary Islands
- ☐ Cantabria
- ☐ Castilla-La Mancha
- ☐ Castile and León
- ☐ Catalonia
- ☐ Valencian Community
- ☐ Extremadura
- ☐ Galicia
- ☐ La Rioja
- ☐ Community of Madrid
- ☐ Region of Murcia
- ☐ Navarre
- ☐ Basque Country



- ☐ Ceuta
- ☐ Melilla
- ☐ Abroad

4.5 What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ None, or uncompleted primary education
- ☐ Primary school
- ☐ Secondary school
- ☐ Baccalaureate
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree or higher

## Appendix 2. Survey questions in Spanish

### 1. Hábitos de viaje

1.1 ¿Cuántas veces ha viajado al extranjero de vacaciones y a qué países?

- ☐ Nunca
- ☐ Entre 1 y 4 veces
- ☐ Entre 5 y 10 veces
- ☐ Más de 10 veces

¿A qué países? \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Por favor, indique el grado de importancia que tienen para usted los siguientes motivos a la hora de escoger un destino turístico.

	Nada importante	Bastante importante	Muy importante
Conocer algo nuevo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Descansar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vivir nuevas aventuras	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diversión y recreación	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cambio de ambiente	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pasar tiempo con la familia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pasar tiempo con los amigos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hacer deportes activos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playa y sol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comer bien	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relajarse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conocer otras culturas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.3 Si piensa en el viaje que siempre ha soñado, ¿cuáles son los primeros destinos que le vienen a la mente? \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 ¿Cómo de atractivos le resultan las siguientes actividades?

	Nada atractivo	Bastante atractivo	Muy atractivo
Actividades deportivas (ciclismo, golf, deportes de motor...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actividades de verano (playa, cruceros, canotaje, pesca...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actividades de invierno (auroras boreales, esquiar, moto de nieve, safaris con huskis y renos...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actividades culturales (visitar museos y festivales, ver monumentos...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Actividades de bienestar (spa, sauna, meditación...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actividades gastronómicas (degustaciones, escuela de cocina...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 2. Redes sociales

### 2.1 ¿Qué redes sociales utiliza?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Google+
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Otra
- ☐ No estoy en redes sociales

### 2.2 ¿Cuál es su red social favorita?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Google+
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Otra
- ☐ No estoy en redes sociales

### 2.3 ¿Sigue a marcas en las redes sociales?

- ☐ Sigo marcas
- ☐ No sigo marcas

### 2.4 ¿Qué tipo de marcas sigue en las redes sociales?

- ☐ Medios de comunicación
- ☐ Deportes y motor
- ☐ Tecnología

- ☐ Ocio
- ☐ Moda
- ☐ Viajes y turismo
- ☐ Salud y belleza
- ☐ Comida y bebida
- ☐ Otro
- ☐ No sigo marcas

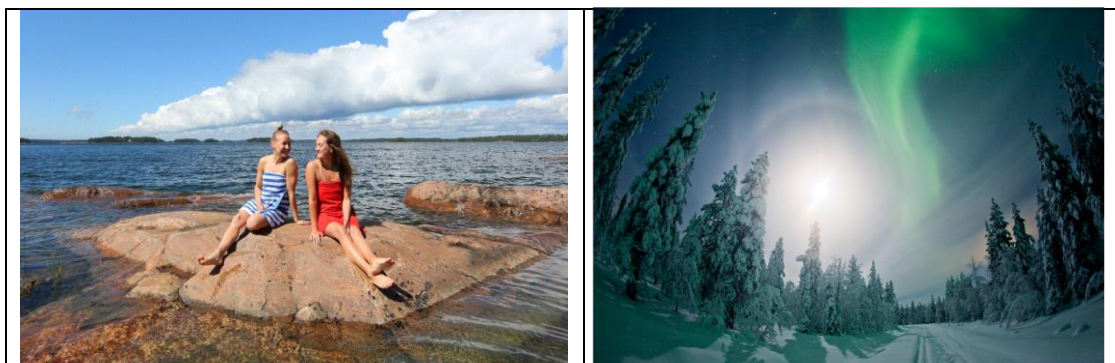
2.5 A la hora de seguir marcas en las redes sociales, ¿cómo de importantes considera usted los siguientes característicos del contenido?

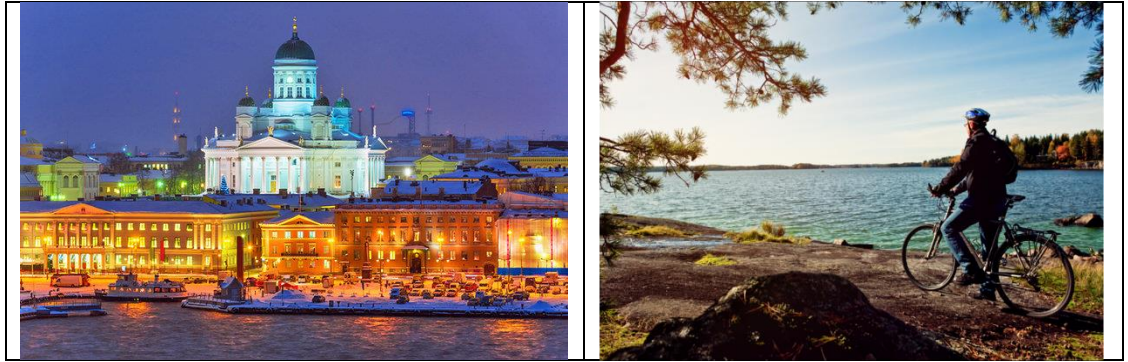
	Nada importante	Bastante importante	Muy importante
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Autentico	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informativo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Divertido	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Original	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relevante	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visualmente atractivo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compatible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversacional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sencillo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Colorido	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alta calidad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valor para el usuario	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temas actuales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 3. Finlandia como destino turístico

3.1 Si piensa en Finlandia como destino turístico, ¿cuáles son las primeras asociaciones que vienen a su mente? \_\_\_\_\_

3.2.1 De las siguientes imágenes, ¿cuál le llama más la atención?





3.2.2 De las siguientes imágenes, ¿cuál le llama más la atención?



3.2.3 De las siguientes imágenes, ¿cuál le llama más la atención?







3.2.4 De las siguientes imágenes, ¿cuál le llama más la atención?



3.2.5 De las siguientes imágenes, ¿cuál le llama más la atención?





3.3 Después de haber visto estas imágenes, ¿cómo describiría Finlandia como destino turístico en sus propias palabras? \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Demografía

4.1 ¿Cuál de las siguientes categorías incluye su edad?

- ☐ 17 años o menor
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 años o mayor

4.2 Sexo:

- ☐ Mujer
- ☐ Hombre

4.3 Incluyéndose a usted, ¿cuántas personas viven en su hogar?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4 o más

4.4 Comunidad Autónoma de residencia:

- ☐ Andalucía
- ☐ Aragón
- ☐ Principado de Asturias
- ☐ Islas Baleares
- ☐ Canarias
- ☐ Cantabria
- ☐ Castilla-La Mancha
- ☐ Castilla y León
- ☐ Cataluña
- ☐ Comunidad Valenciana
- ☐ Extremadura
- ☐ Galicia
- ☐ La Rioja
- ☐ Comunidad de Madrid
- ☐ Región de Murcia
- ☐ Comunidad Foral de Navarra
- ☐ País Vasco

- ☐ Ceuta
- ☐ Melilla
- ☐ Extranjero

#### 4.5 ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación?

- ☐ Sin estudios o enseñanza primaria incompleta
- ☐ Primaria
- ☐ Secundaria
- ☐ Bachillerato
- ☐ Universitaria - licenciatura
- ☐ Universitaria - máster
- ☐ Educación Superior – Doctorado o superior